

ETHIOPIA IN CHANGE

Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy

Edited by Abebe Zegeye & Siegfried Pausewang

British Academic Press

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After the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974 Ethiopia experienced a short period of unprecedented freedom and decentralization. This was rapidly followed by a stringent regime of centralized control over people and resources which has played a powerful role in determining the problems faced by Ethiopia today. In the light of the Mengistu period, this book attempts to assess the prospects for change and to identify key policies which must be implemented if Ethiopia is to secure stable and democratic government and economic progress. Bringing together contributions by Ethiopian and European scholars from several disciplines, the book reviews the implications of economic policy for agrarian transformation and development, the effects of Eritrean independence, environmental degradation, food security, ethnic factors and the political process itself. The contributors examine ways in which the Ethiopian people can be involved in a more decentralized and democratic structure which will harness their resources, initiatives and capacities.

This book will prove essential reading for all those with an interest in the transition to democratic forms of government in the developing world and in the future of Ethiopia in the post-Cold War era.

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Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy

Edited by
ABEBE ZEGEYE and
SIEGFRIED PAUSEWANG

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Acronyms

AACM	Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management
AAF	African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment
AFL	Afar Liberation Front
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
CFSCDD	Community Forests and Soil Conservation Development Department
CILSS	Comité Permanent Intre-états de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CODEF	Coalition for Democratic Forces
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa
COEDF	Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces
DERAP	Development Research and Action Programme (at CMI)
DFI	direct foreign investment
DLCO	Desert Locust Control Organization
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECHAT	Ethiopian Oppressed Revolutionary Organization (in Amharic)
EDORM	Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EEC	European Economic Community
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPDU	Ethiopian People's Democratic Union
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERPR	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

ERRP	Emergency Recovery and Reconstruction Project
ESM	Ethiopian Student Movement
ESP	Ethiopian Serategnoch Party (same as WPE)
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students' Union in North America
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (of the United Nations)
FFW	Food-for-Work
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GOSPLAN	(former) Soviet central planning authority
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction Development
IFLO	Islamic Front for the Liberation of the Oromo
IGADD	Inter-governmental Authority for the Control of Drought and Desertification
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	World Conservation Union
LLDC	Least Developed Countries
MEISON	All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement
MLT	Medium and Long Term (loans)
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture (Addis Ababa)
NFD	Northern Frontier District
NGO	non-government organizations
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONCCP	Office of National Committee for Central Planning
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
OPLP	Oromo People's Liberation Front
PA	peasant association
PAMSCAD	poverty alleviation programme in Ghana
PC	producers' cooperative
PCO	Planning Commission Office
PDO	People's Democratic Organization
PLF	Popular Liberation Forces
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
RC	Revolutionary Committee
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission

SADCC	Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SC	service cooperative
SCRp	Soil Conservation Research Project
SEPU	Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Union
SFCDD	State Forest Conservation Development Department
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
SPLM	Sudanese People's Liberation Movement
SRI	Stanford Research Institute
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank report)
TEP	transitional economic policy
TG	transitional government
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TYPP	Ten-Year Perspective Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
URBANSECAL	urban development sector loan
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USUAA	University Students' Union of Addis Ababa
WAPCOS	an Indian government agency
WFP	World Food Programme (of the FAO)
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia (same as ESP)

Glossary of Ethiopian Words

<i>awraja</i>	territorial division, middle level
<i>bajerond</i>	royal treasurer
<i>birtat</i>	positive role played
<i>bitwaddad</i>	most favoured courtier, imperial counsellor, often officiating in the name of the king
<i>blatta</i>	a title generally signifying learning, given in the twentieth century to government officials of the director-general level or equivalent
<i>blatten geta</i>	'master of the <i>blatta</i> ', an exalted version of the title <i>blatta</i> , given to government officials of the ministerial level
<i>buda</i>	the evil eye
<i>chickashum</i>	lowest unit of government authority
<i>corvé</i>	forced labour (Fr.)
<i>dajiach</i>	short for <i>Dejazmatch</i>
<i>darg</i>	committee: the ruling committee 1974-85
<i>debo</i>	mutual help agreements
<i>degga</i>	highland
<i>Dejazmatch</i>	'commander of the gate', a politico-military title
<i>diesa</i>	communal land
<i>dominale</i>	state land
<i>edir</i>	neighbourhood burial association; mutual help organization
<i>equb</i>	savings exchange groups
<i>Ethiopia tikdem</i>	Ethiopia first
<i>gabarewotch mahber</i>	peasant associations
<i>gada</i>	system of age cycles of the Oromo
<i>gebar</i>	farmer, peasant; literally a contributor
<i>gibir</i>	tribute
<i>gult</i>	land allocated to servants of the Crown
<i>hakim</i>	doctor
<i>kebele</i>	urban dwellers' associations

<i>keftegna</i>	'higher' kebele, urban district comprising 15–25 kebeles
<i>kelil</i>	reserves
<i>ketema</i>	garrison towns
<i>maarro</i>	obligation to share food and other goods among the Bale Oromo
<i>makuanint</i>	nobility
<i>mar geber</i>	honey tribute
<i>Mari Geta</i>	title of teaching staff in Ethiopian Church
<i>Mesfinate</i>	period: Era of the Princes (1786–1855)
<i>mihur</i>	intellectual
<i>nagaadras</i>	'head of merchants', originally leader of a merchant caravan, later chief government official in charge of the collection of customs
<i>neftenya</i>	landlord, usually of northern origin; colonial settler. Literally 'man with a gun'.
<i>negus</i>	king
<i>noug</i>	niger seed
<i>Ras</i>	title of nobility (Duke)
<i>resti</i>	inherited land; same as <i>rist</i> (Tig.)
<i>rist</i>	form of land tenure, with a right to a share in the community's land
<i>rist-gult</i>	hereditary gult rights; in the south under Hayla-Sellase granted as quasi-ownership of land
<i>Shengo</i>	Assembly
<i>shum-shir</i>	appointments and dismissals
<i>Tawahido</i>	Ethiopian Orthodox definition of the nature of Christ
<i>tela</i>	local beer
<i>tsahafe te'ez</i>	head of the royal scribes, keeper of the royal seal, title of the Minister of Pen after 1907
<i>Were Seh</i>	Oromo clan in Wollo
<i>weredas/woreda</i>	lower administrative unit
<i>Zamana Masafint</i>	period: Era of the Princes (1769–1855)
<i>zemacha</i>	campaign; often referring to the student campaigns of 1974–76

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1. Introduction: Looking Back into the Future

Abebe Zegeye and Siegfried Pausewang

Ethiopia made a new start in 1991, but it is yet too early to give an objective assessment of the direction in which it is likely to move. The provisional government is facing a multitude of problems which have to be solved before the country can start on a new path towards development.

Ethiopian society is in a state of rapid change and the experiences of the period of 1974 to 1992 will have important effects on the direction this takes. A critical look back over the last 19 years of Ethiopian history can help define the issues confronting society today and show how best to make use of the lessons learned.

If issues urgently demanding resolution in so many fields are to be confronted and new pitfalls are to be avoided, it is important to understand the 'experiment' of the revolutionary period and its consequences. Most important, following the dissolution of cooperatives and many state farms and the weakening of the authority of peasant associations, the question of land ownership and its redistribution has once again come to the fore. This is a question of tremendous importance for the majority of Ethiopians depending as they do on access to agricultural land for their livelihood; and it raises general issues of policy because it involves having to decide whether to give priority to ensuring efficient production or to feeding the poor. An emphasis on the latter would favour policies that put self-supply, subsistence production, food security and famine preparedness first. In a fast growing population, food security can hardly be achieved unless every family is able to feed itself and keep back whatever reserves are necessary for bad years. Unless population growth can be considerably reduced, there will be a periodic demand for land redistribution and if this demand is not met the number of landless and unemployed poor will inevitably

increase. On the other hand, if land is redistributed, farm land will have to be subdivided until a point is reached where plots cease to become available.

Macro-economists may be tempted to seek a way out of the dilemma by placing the emphasis on trying to achieve efficient production on technically advanced modern farms. But, given the present population structure, this is a dangerous path to choose: modern machinery is expensive both to import and to run. It requires foreign currency, which can only be earned through selling to an international market, which in turn offers poor prices for rural products. A policy of increased production through imported technology may result in more being paid for the inputs than can be earned from the sale of the produce, as demonstrated by state farms in the past. Moreover, mechanization will inevitably increase the number of unemployed; thus more efficient food production may end up making those people it was supposed to feed unable to afford the food produced.

Since it is generally accepted that agriculture has a key role to play in stimulating economic growth in Ethiopia, these problems are of prime importance for any future development. Moreover, agricultural development must ensure that the policies that are implemented result in stabilizing the ecological balance and controlling erosion. It would be impossible to sustain agricultural development without curbing ecological deterioration.

The provisional government is also beset by other problems, foremost among which is the question of political reorganization. The issue of nationality has become so central to Ethiopian political life that without the formulation of a clear policy, no new administrative structure seems possible. In order to build up a new system of democracy, it is essential that the different levels of decentralization should be defined and agreed upon.

To be effective, a democracy also needs to control economic forces and interests, which is an inseparable part of making difficult political decisions. The government is under great pressure, both at home and abroad, to establish a market economy, yet at the same time it is conscious of the need to control the key economic factors. Whether a mixed economy is compatible with a balance between free market forces and sufficient political control is open to debate, and the precise content of the mix is no less contentious.

Another key issue, which is sensitive both internationally and internally, is respect for human rights and the protection of minorities,

whether ethnic, social, religious or linguistic. There is also a need for new solutions to the problems of public health, education, child welfare, gender, unemployment and internal security – the list could go on almost indefinitely.

As if all of this were not enough, the new government has found itself under strong pressure from the World Bank and international donors to implement a structural adjustment programme. While major economic restructuring is imperative in Ethiopia, this external pressure has put strong restrictions on the possible range of economic decisions, limiting the choices open for government action. It has also limited the scope for implementing different internal policies.

The difficulties facing Ethiopia are grave and have no easy solution. The new government is in a most unenviable position. Given that it has empty treasuries, faces a host of conflicting demands from different social groups within, is being attacked by nationalist resistance groups and an urban elite violently opposing Eritrean independence and lives under the constant threat of confrontations breaking out between the different religious groups, it must be sorely tempted to avoid making decisions wherever possible.

A new start can only have some hope of success and win legitimacy if it is able to provide a new vision for the future. While the struggle over what new policies to implement remains unresolved, the government has yielded to pressure for structural adjustment and has agreed to devalue the birr. Judging from the economic reforms so far implemented, the government has shown no sign of being able to deliver any new or credible vision of a better future.

For all these reasons it is important to look back at the Mengistu period to try to find an explanation for what went wrong and why. Through such analysis one may hope to arrive at a better understanding of which paths to pursue in future and which to avoid.

The aim of this volume is to attempt such a look 'back into the future'. In different fields and from different angles our authors (seven of whom are Ethiopian) try to draw lessons from the Mengistu past that might have relevance for the future (some go even further back into Ethiopian history).

On looking through the various contributions to this book, it is noticeable that they all converge on one broad theme, namely a firm preference for decentralized solutions. At first sight this could be taken as a fashionable scepticism concerning (or instinctive aversion from) the strong emphasis that has been prevalent in the recent past on central

decisions and a central monopoly of power. On a second reading, however, deeper convergences appear in relief. Though the authors work in different fields, approach their subjects from different angles and employ different methods of analysis, they communicate a similar message: the Ethiopian government should encourage decentralization and place more trust in the practical knowledge of the peasants; it needs to value its local communities and local institutions.

The prospect of being able to rely on the knowledge and initiatives of local people to find solutions to the innumerable and complex problems facing their society is a thesis worthy of close attention. The slogan 'think globally, act locally' may have renewed relevance in present day Ethiopia: if a solution is to be found it is likely to come from diverse and decentralized efforts, from a multitude of local initiatives and from the mobilization of the will of the people to improve their collective situation.

For example, the most basic requirement of development is that it should create conditions that allow everybody access to sufficient food for a decent life. A worldwide right to food has been asked for many times, but it has proved to be quite unattainable on a global level. The world community has subsided into helplessness: no international agency could realistically assume the responsibility of feeding all the poor of the world. And even if it could, the massive distribution of food might itself create new problems by spoiling food markets and undermining the economic base of food producers, thus increasing the number of mouths to feed. The right to food is therefore nowhere codified in a way committing any agency to more than a general intention to work for economic conditions that may eventually provide food for all.

Local systems that have for a long time practised an individual right to food are not, however, unknown. They have usually operated within the narrow confines of societies that were much poorer than they are today in terms of the absolute availability of food and food reserves per person. They managed, however, to build up a social security system on the basis of a right to community membership, inseparably linked with an obligation to contribute to the provision of a minimum for all. Being poor, such societies could soon reach their limits; but so long as there was food the obligation to share and the right to receive existed.

A new way of thinking, which starts at the local level and uses the traditional knowledge of the people, has to begin by reactivating systems of mutual help and local co-responsibility. People who work on

the land do have experience of keeping stocks for emergencies. Food security and disaster preparedness are traditional parts of rural life. A wealth of knowledge about wild foods that can be collected in times of drought thus allowing people to survive in extreme situations is preserved in many areas.

These traditions must be revitalized so that in times of hardship people can claim food security and access to work from their community and can feed themselves from the land during normal harvests, thus being encouraged to assume responsibility for organizing their own food security within their own community.

This common theme, which has emerged from the views of the different authors, signals a shift in our thinking on Ethiopian development: whereas in the past the responsibility for national development and economic growth was laid squarely at the feet of central government, it seems initiatives are now expected from below and the responsibility for finding appropriate solutions and administering them appears decentralized. Democracy as decentralization thus appears to be a common denominator, whether authors deal with the economy or famine, the environment or education. Development is no longer expected to come from investments from abroad, but from local and individual efforts. It is expected to start not with cooperation between a government and foreign donor nations, but with more influence, power, resources, rights, information and responsibility being given to the people, working through their own institutions.

If it is taken as a democratic principle that although people may have different cultures they are equal in their rights and responsibilities, then mechanisms will have to be found to reverse the rapidly growing differentiation that has been observed over the past 15 years. Differences have been allowed to grow within a state that has monopolized control over economic resources and political decisions. Differences have increased not only in political power, but also (at least as important) in economic influence, social position and the degree to which access is available to information, sources of knowledge and health care. If this trend is to be reversed, then political decisions must inevitably be brought closer to the people and as much responsibility and authority as possible delegated to small local units, to the neighbourhoods, the *edir* and *equb*, the *debo* and *maarro*, the *kebele*, the peasant associations and labour unions. Only decision making by people in the small and coherent groups with which they are familiar will allow the optimum mobilization of their initiative, expertise and human resources.

The principle that people are different but peers also requires a new orientation for development policies. It demands that more emphasis should be placed on attaining immediate results for the well-being of the majority, especially of those who are less privileged. It places the well-being of the people at the focal point of development efforts. Even if the ultimate goal, the growth of welfare, is unchanged, the changed emphasis relegates the aims of modernization, economic growth and efficiency to a secondary position. Postponing the immediate consumption of benefits for the sake of future improvement may be a good investment principle for people who can afford it: it becomes meaningless for people who are too poor to save and who would starve before they could reap the benefits of investments paid through their sacrifice.

Local responsibility for administration and development would also go a long way towards defusing the tensions growing out of nationality conflicts in today's Ethiopia. At a local level, peasants can pursue their particular interests and find specific solutions without violating or questioning their loyalty to their nationality group. Instead of fighting for central power, organizations of nationalities can concern themselves with locally applicable policies, trying to influence local decisions and staking out their position on issues specifically concerning local people. The central government for its part can be concerned with offering support to local demands, rather than controlling and checking the influence of their supposed rivals.

Integrating peasants, irrespective of their nationality, as equals into independent communities that would form integral parts of one nation state would abolish the need to organize nationalities as political parties or pressure groups. From very different starting positions in their respective contributions to this volume both Adhana and Melaku visualize the possibility of an alternative process. They both want to replace the competition between nationalities for political influence with a balanced coexistence in which people are recognized as different but equal entities, as co-responsible for collective development. Adhana detects in the EPRDF programme a chance of creating an Ethiopian nation state that would integrate both peasants and urban professionals of all nationalities as equals into one nation state. Melaku challenges the EPLF to allow equality for all national and political groups and interests in Eritrea. What these authors share is a trust in the collective decisions of independent individuals irrespective of their ethnic or social origins.

Bahru Zewede attempts to locate the historical point at which

Emperor Hayla-Sellase might be considered to have changed from a progressive to a reactionary. In his study he analyses the place of education and charts the mutual disillusionment between emperor and student.

In a somewhat different context Randi Balsvik found this same willingness to trust the ingenuity of ordinary people in the student policies of the late Hayla-Sellase period. Student opposition formed an important starting point for the revolution of 1974 and, by helping peasants organize their associations into local, independent and self-determining decision-making units, students played a significant role in the land reform and its implementation. Their ideals of equal rights were, however, later pushed aside in favour of an Eastern European style of central state authority, a shift of direction requiring explanation.

The common denominator of the historical chapters can thus be seen as a position supporting the equality of all nationalities, social groups and opinions. Their hope for Ethiopia's future would lie not in chauvinist nationalism, but in independent people of different beliefs, nationalities and professions working together, proud of having equality as peers among equals. Whether such a transformation of attitudes can be achieved remains to be seen.

In looking at Ethiopian underdevelopment Eshetu tackles the theme head on. From an economist's viewpoint he asks why Ethiopian underdevelopment persists despite different theories having been implemented and various prescriptions experimented with over the course of the last 25 years. He refuses to offer an easy answer, but between the lines the reader is able to discern where he feels the openings to change may be located. Though he sees agriculture and industry as interwoven and interdependent, he believes that development should be concentrated predominantly in the rural areas, where it would benefit the majority of the poor.

In describing the new economic policies tried out in Ethiopia during Mengistu's last year in power, Stefan Brüne concurs with this view and asks what a 'mixed economy' would have looked like and what consequences it would have produced for the rural poor had it been given a longer period to work. Fantu Cheru picks up the thread where Stefan Brüne leaves off, suggesting an alternative model of structural adjustment and transformation for the post-Mengistu period. In line with the ECA's African Alternative Framework, his basic question is, adjustment for whom and by whom? Fantu Cheru offers the Ethiopian government a synopsis of an alternative adjustment policy that uses

local resources and peasant knowledge for a new economic start. Jonathan Baker adds another dimension to this argument by insisting that, instead of feeding off the rural population, the small urban centres must be reoriented towards supporting rural development.

Taken as a whole the economic arguments present an alternative vision, a vision in which people are placed at the centre of economic development. From different contexts and in different ways each of the contributors envisages the granting of equal chances to all as a basic pillar of the economy. They expect future vitality and prosperity to stem from a decentralization of economic initiative, power, influence and control. Economic development means decentralized development for and by the small peasants, through the exploitation of their own local resources and initiative.

Two contributions deal with the specific problems of the rural environment. Abebe Zegeye analyses how peasants can find ways to regain control over factors of degradation affecting vegetation, erosion, forestry cover and fuelwood supplies, which even affect weather conditions. He argues that environmental security is absolutely fundamental if improvements in the well-being of peasants are to be achieved and that they themselves must be allowed to be in control of their environment. The experiences of Dessalegn Rahmato show that they have the capacity to expand their traditional preparedness systems for emergencies. He worked for years in drought and famine areas⁷ and is impressed by people's ability to establish their own local famine prevention. He asks for a positive attitude and sympathetic support from society at large to make the task easier.

Famine usually occurs in the rural areas where the food is produced and not in the towns. Peasants cannot afford to eat the crops of their own fields and cannot keep back the necessary reserves before selling what they can do without. Urban groups have always found ways of acquiring food from villages after the harvest, even if, in years of harvest deficits, the villagers are left without any for themselves. Traders are quick to put peasants under pressure to sell, especially if a bad harvest indicates that prices might soon rise. Creditors demand repayment after the harvest and the peasants have little choice but to sell. Taxes have to be paid and tax collectors know from experience that peasants might not be able to pay if they wait too long after the harvest. Until 1990 the AMC quotas were rigorously collected immediately after the harvest; in fact the peasants themselves would bring their grain to the AMC or cooperative stores because they were afraid that if they

did not comply they would be regarded as candidates for resettlement.

Experience in other African countries also shows that urban interest groups almost invariably find ways of securing their supplies from rural areas, even if peasants are left without food reserves for their own use until the next harvest. It seems that the more the signs indicate that a shortage might occur, the more eager are urban traders to fill their stores so as to supply a rising market.

Early warning signals exist and are generally known to peasants. These signals are taken seriously and systematically recorded and used to plan for storage and for the taking of preventive measures. Such signals are locally specific and have to be analysed and utilized within a given locality.

It is a sad fact that local knowledge is appreciated neither by the bureaucracy nor in academic circles. Administrators believe that they are supposed to know what is best; scholars easily take it for granted that a report not written in a scholarly style and not properly documented is shallow and unworthy of serious attention. Occasionally people who have benefited from local practice try to get across the message that local knowledge could be utilized on a wider scale, but they seldom receive the attention they deserve.

Dessalegn Rahmato has documented how peasants in earlier times were accustomed to keeping reserves for emergency situations. These systems broke down when urban interests neglected peasant knowledge, arguing that peasants still had food and that additional burdens could easily be shouldered by them as there were so many to carry them. Such systems are difficult to re-establish once population growth and the fragmentation of plots reduce the productive capacity of each peasant, while burdens and demands from outside increase. However, peasants still have the capacity to organize mutual help systems to combat famines, knowing as they do how to interpret early warning signs and how to plan for storage and distribution.

If peasants are left to determine their own needs and allowed to keep the necessary resources, they may be able to prevent famine or at least mitigate its effects through appropriate action at the local level. It must be borne in mind that there are trade and transport facilities for moving food items from the villages to the urban markets in normal years and that these facilities can be utilized to reverse the flow as well, bringing food reserves into the rural areas in times of drought. If measures are taken in good time there is no reason for expensive international emergency food distribution in remote rural areas. Rather, international

solidarity could provide the urban areas with food more cheaply and with the expenditure of much less logistic effort than would be required to deliver it to starving peasants. If international solidarity could guarantee that food would be provided in time, a local early warning system could then make available the marginal supplies to cover the deficit in local production before a state of famine could arise.

Issues of nationality have come to dominate the political arena and Siegfried Pausewang argues that no successor government can win legitimacy without solving the nationality question. The EPRDF tried to tackle it by means of a coalition government; but while the different ethnic resistance movements cooperated in the government coalition in Addis Ababa, the conflict was transferred to the local level, where it emerged as a struggle for local control during the 1992 elections. The rural population is, however, tired of the war and may well be able to restrain local politicians from carrying the conflict further, provided rural people are given more influence in local affairs and local politicians become accountable to their electorate.

Alexander Krylow, who has followed rebel resistance movements for many years, argues that there is no way round ethnic conflicts in present day Ethiopia. He sees great difficulties for any future democratic development and locates these as arising from the danger that any political organization will tend to mobilize the electorate along ethnic rather than political lines. He fears this may be aggravated by the traditional confrontational character of Ethiopian political life. Pausewang also acknowledges the danger, but hopes that peasants will find a way of avoiding the destructive consequences by organizing on different levels: their basic interests should be represented and fought for at a local, not a national, level. They can only win if they follow their interests at different levels: as Oromo or Amhara, as Muslims or Christians, as members of their *kebele*, as sons of Wallaga, Gojjam or Menz, as Ethiopians or as Africans.

If a general conclusion may be detected in the political analysis, it lies in the hope of a renewal of Ethiopian political culture through revitalization of the rural communities. The only hope of overcoming the many problems Mengistu left behind for his successors lies in fostering the spirit of local cooperation, in finding practical solutions to perceived problems instead of viewing them in the light of ideological principles and in following the tradition of compromise and of individual rights imbedded in collective responsibility.

These problems are described in Dessalegn Rahmato's analysis of

the reasons for rural unrest and conflict after Mengistu's fall. From his recent field experience, Dessalegn believes that the three main reasons for peasant frustration and discontent under Mengistu were their insecurity about land, their destabilization through resettlement and villagization, and their impoverishment. He sees peasant unrest as a consequence of ill-conceived policies imposed on them regardless of community participation and initiative.

If, instead of being directed against a particular ethnic or economic group, peasant violence were used as an outlet for long suppressed frustrations, then the conclusion may be strengthened that the revival of rural culture and the support of peasant ingenuity in finding local compromises could go a long way toward offering hope for a renewal of Ethiopian society and political life. Learning from the peasants may indeed be the key to a new start. Tapping local cultures rather than suppressing their defensive resistance against infringements may be the best guiding principle of democratic development and economic progress.

Dawit Abate analyses the antecedents of transition government and the problems facing it. In order to achieve this he considers the relationships between the various liberation fronts and their influence on current politics.

2. Mutation of Statehood and Contemporary Politics

Adhana Haile Adhana

In the early 1960s, Jesman (1963: 1) referred to Ethiopia as a country burdened with its past. He claimed that 'the current difficulties of Ethiopia are those of an ancient polity adjusting itself to the modern world'. According to Gebru (1991: xiii), 'there are few countries in Africa that are as enriched and burdened by the past as Ethiopia.' If this is the case, history, more than any other discipline, must inform our understanding of contemporary Ethiopian politics, which is also what Clapham (1988: 13) wants us to take into account. In the 1974 revolution, he sees 'the Ethiopian political tradition [rather than Marxist universal categories] ... as central to the understanding of the forces at work'. As he argues, the effect of the latter,

is to reduce the past from a dynamic series of complex interactions into a two-dimensional backcloth from which appropriate figures – feudalism, imperialism, exploitation – can be cut out and propped up to serve as pointers to revolutionary developments. What is lost in the process is not simply an understanding of the past in itself, but equally a perception of history as something that continues with undiminished force into the present.

Clapham himself does not, however, follow the methodology he proposes, but instead acknowledges the value of his 'experience of the imperial regime ... in studying revolutionary Ethiopia' (Clapham 1988: 13). He thus limits the great potential of his methodology by conceiving of Ethiopian history merely in terms of the recent imperial regime. Thus he argues (Clapham 1988: 21) that: 'Although Ethiopia has continuously formed a multi-ethnic political system, participation in national political life normally required assimilation to the cultural

values of the Amhara core: the Amharic language, orthodox Christianity and a capacity to operate within the structures and assumptions of a court administration.' Ethiopian history is thus reduced to 'the Amhara core', including orthodox Christianity. Clapham (1988: 24) then employs it to unlock the secrets of Ethiopian history:

It is essential to emphasise the plasticity of Amhara – and hence, in a sense, of Ethiopian – identity in order to correct the very misleading impression that can be given by associating it with the descent-based ethnic identities characteristic of many other African societies. Being Amhara is much more a matter of how one behaves than of who one's parents were; and without this capacity for assimilating other peoples into a core culture which can be regarded as national, and not the exclusive property of a particular group of people, the Ethiopian state would probably have been unable to sustain itself in the first place.

What Clapham sees as an Amhara identity is regarded as an 'Abyssinian' identity by Markakis (n.d.: 92, 95, 99), whose 'Abyssinian provinces' include the Tigray, Agaw and Amhara. The two authors clearly comprehend the same reality in different ways. Much may be said about the differences. One thing appears to be basic, however. Markakis conceives of the 'imperial regime' in terms of an untransformed (or a constant) past, while Clapham comprehends the past through the 'imperial regime'. The latter clearly reads history backwards. Their conceptions of contemporary Ethiopian politics (i.e. of the 'imperial' and *Darg* periods) also differ.

Markakis (n.d.: 98) locates the origins of the 1974 popular upsurge 'in a broad setting of a rural sector rendered highly volatile by the combined effect of ethnic and class cleavages.' These cleavages were, he explains, 'partly the unwitting result of land tenure reforms introduced in the 1960s,' by which the Abyssinian aristocracy 'unambiguously dispossessed' the peasantry in the southern non-Abyssinian region. Given this antagonism between the 'Abyssinian' north and 'non-Abyssinian' south, how does the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM, 1960–1974), that *bête noire* of the imperial regime, fit into the scheme? Markakis first identifies the Abyssinians, especially the Amhara, as 'by far the largest element' then in the 'educated stratum'.

Secondly, Markakis observes, 'student radicals aimed at a social revolution that would catapult their society from its medieval perch to

the forefront of the twentieth century.' They were also 'nationalists, that is, they were convinced of the necessity to maintain the unity of the Ethiopian state.' Socialism, the declared ideology of the student movement, therefore 'served mainly as the handmaiden of embattled nationalism' (Markakis n.d.: 99, 101, 271). A neat picture thus emerges. The Abyssinian nationalists, despite their espousal of Marxism, essentially aimed at removing the cardinal contradiction of Ethiopian statehood: the antagonism between the 'Abyssinian aristocracy' and the southern peasantry, the 'ethnic and class cleavages'. Markakis's conception of Ethiopian history could easily give rise to a political trend that suspects as 'Abyssinian' everything the 'Abyssinians' say and do, however true, and engage in a struggle for total independence. Thus what has to be questioned is not just the foundation of Ethiopian statehood but its very continuity. Such a trend, represented by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), does in fact exist in contemporary Ethiopian politics.

Clapham pursues a different line and indicates different prospects. His construct of the 'plasticity of Amhara identity' conveniently helps him to dispense with the 'ethnic cleavage' as something transient given the removal of its economic exploitation or the class contradiction. Clapham locates Ethiopian difficulties under the 'imperial regime' in a process of interaction with the capitalist world that converted the monarchy into a 'modernizing' or 'military' autocracy. The process spawned new forces (classes and social groups), which became alienated (except, possibly, the bureaucrats) from autocracy, which had already cut itself off from 'the countryside'. Cash-crop (coffee) economy and foreign support became the lifeline of autocracy – conditions that 'created an explosive combination of economic exploitation with ethnic differentiation' in the south, and meant 'progressive peripheralization' of the 'subsistence economy' of the northern peasantry. Having thus asphyxiated itself, the 'military' autocracy required only an urban popular upsurge (apparently a misguided one as it seems) of opposition to tumble down, as it did in 1974. The problem, Clapham (1988: 26–35) emphasizes, was 'structural' – that is, it was neither 'personal' nor 'dynastic'. 'Ethnic differentiation' is not central to his conception of the problems of the 'new Ethiopian state'. In fact, apart from economic problems, the ills of the Ethiopian state appeared to him to be in the process of being overcome with the demise of autocracy. Thus Clapham partakes in, if he has not engendered, the views of those who could not ostensibly see any sense, other than that of a conspiracy to disinte-

grate the Ethiopian state, in what they deride as 'ethnic politics'. The national conflict has been swept away with the old regime – together with the class conflict in the south. Such a political trend, not least in its chauvinistic form, has been in vogue since 1975, and today it remains with us, including the form of political groupings.

Both Clapham and Markakis steer clear of characterizing the 'new Ethiopian state'. Is it or was it an empire (empire–state) or a nation (nation–state)? But Markakis, who is well acquainted with Ethiopian history, did refer to the state as an empire in an earlier work (Markakis 1974: 20). Jesman (1963: 69) understands it as a 'modern empire'. Marcus (1983: 4, 7, 182) calls it merely an empire, and its constituents peoples. Hess (1970: 51, 59) also sees it as empire, as does Thomson (1975: 14). The Ottaways (1978) titled their book *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*. But this conception does not belong solely to foreigners. In the eyes of an eminent Ethiopian historian from Bulga (in northern Shawa) the 'modern' Ethiopian state had not yet attained nationhood by 1972. He (Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 302) wrote:

Ethiopia has a particular tendency to repeat itself. The military exploits of King Amda-Siyon [who ruled from 1314 to 1344] strongly remind one of the great achievements of the Aksumite kings of Ezana [c. AD 25–350] and Kaleb [first half of the sixth century AD] on whom he seems to have modelled himself. More recently, in the nineteenth century, the extensive conquests and expansion of Amda-Siyon were dramatically re-enacted by Emperor Menilek [1889–1913] who, just like his fourteenth-century predecessor, had the Shawan plateau as the centre of his military activities. It remains to be seen, however, [and this is an important point] whether Menilek and his successors have been more successful than other medieval counterparts in the essential task of building an Ethiopian nation.

As we shall see subsequently, Taddesse does not conceive of Ethiopian history as one of monotonous successions of empirehood alternatively waxing and waning.

Two other Ethiopians have also emphasized the imperial nature of the 'modern' Ethiopian state. Addis Hiwet categorically qualifies it as an 'empire–state' as well as dating the birth of 'modern' Ethiopia from the reign of Menilek II. Menilek, he observes, created 'a typical pre-capitalist empire–state'. Moreover, he characterizes 'the historical

product' of Menilek's 'era of empire building' as *military-feudal-colonialism*. Addis Hiwet attaches decisive significance to this 'product' in determining subsequent developments. 'Virtually the whole complex social political structure of modern Ethiopia (1900–1970s) was evolved directly out of and is based upon it. Without a clear grasp of this concept it is virtually impossible to understand any of the fundamental elements of pre- and post-war Ethiopian socio-political realities. As Addis Hiwet (1975: iii, 1, 4) conceives it, the 'popular democratic upsurge' of 1974 'is a revolt against the societal conditions of the 1890s, 1900s, 1940s and 1960s as much as against societal conditions in 1974. It is the result of fundamental historical contradictions – land tenure, feudal absolutism, the nature and relationship of social and class forces – as they have developed during the last 80 or so years.' This quotation contains much abstraction. It nevertheless stresses the imperial nature of the state as the source of basic contradictions, which are mirrored as class rather than 'class and national' conflicts.

The historian, Gebru Tareke, gives us more concrete insights. He (1977: 3, 6; 1991: 37), like Addis Hiwet, characterizes modern Ethiopia as an empire-state. He stresses its multinationality, with which, as we have seen, Clapham also agrees – although he chooses to call it 'multi-ethnic'. But that is not the sole attribute of the empire-state for Gebru (1977: 3). What makes it an empire-state is that 'It is neither homogeneous, nor is it a historically constituted society. It is a conglomeration of diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups brought together and largely maintained by force.' As we shall see subsequently, this, rather than multinationality *per se*, is an important attribute of nationhood in Ethiopian history.

More concrete still is Gebru's distinction between Aksum, Christian Abyssinia and Ethiopia. He rightly understands Christian Abyssinia as being a direct offspring of Aksum. He does not, however, regard the modern Ethiopian state as the offspring of Christian Abyssinia, despite the fact that the latter 'certainly manifests itself in the economic, social and political institutions of Ethiopia'. He (Gebru 1977: 6) emphasizes discontinuities rather than continuities in the succession from Christian Abyssinia to modern Ethiopia. First, he more or less repeats Addis Hiwet. As he puts it, the 'new empire-state, which came into being at the turn of the twentieth century, both in its geographical limitations and socio-economic structure was, by and large, of the making of the Shawan warlords headed by their consummate politician, Menilek.'

The question is, why should the creature of Shewan warlords be any different from the creature of previous warlords. The one principal reason he advances is that modern Ethiopia is an 'Amhara-dominated state' (Gebru 1991: 206). The contrast thus becomes that between an Amhara Ethiopia and a Christian Abyssinia – the former being an empire–state and the latter viewed as a Christian nation. The real point is that, in contrast to Clapham and Markakis, Gebru detects a mutation of the historic Ethiopian statehood since 1889. This is why he puts persistent emphasis on such categories as Abyssinian society, the Abyssinian cultivator, Abyssinia, Christian Abyssinia, and feudal Abyssinia in contrast to Ethiopia and Ethiopian (Gebru 1977: 17, 50, 51, 66). In his latest work, Gebru (1991: 64, 70, 205, 206) still employs such conceptions as the Abyssinian polity, Abyssinianizing, and Abyssinian–Christian culture. He also (1991: 221, 225) refers to extra-class political movements in contemporary Ethiopia as 'ethno-regionalism' and 'ethno-nationalism'.

Tadesse nowhere uses the name 'Abyssinia' or its derivatives. Nor can we expect him to conceive of contemporary Ethiopia as an 'Amhara-dominated state'. But he is the best authority on what Gebru calls 'Christian Abyssinia' during its heyday (1270–1527) in particular. It has been a convention to call it the medieval period. The conceptions used by Tadesse to comprehend the medieval state consist of such categories as Christian kingdom, Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, Christian empire, Medieval empire, Medieval Christian empire of Ethiopia, or simply kingdom, with the first being employed much more often than the rest (Tadesse 1972: 19, 20, 45, 46, 51, 95, 98, 302). Furthermore, he also significantly employs the concept, Christian nation (1972: 302). Tadesse clearly conceives of two distinct components of the medieval state: nation and empire. The adjective 'Christian' clearly refers to the nation, as a builder, a core, or a component of the empire. What Gebru refers to as 'Abyssinian' apparently corresponds to 'Christian' in Tadesse. Gebru's conception, therefore, inadequately mirrors the nature (or characteristic) of the pre-Menilek Ethiopian state, of which Tadesse has a firm grasp. How Tadesse (1972: 302) has fully grasped the nature of that state can be learned from his summation of the experience of Ethiopian statehood between 1270 and 1543:

[The] best key for the swift victories of Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim [of Harar, against the Christian state during 1529–1543] seems to be the heterogeneous character of the medieval Christian empire

of Ethiopia. Among the rulers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries [periods of great territorial expansion and consolidation] King Zara-Y'iqob [ruled 1434–68] stands out as the only monarch who made a serious attempt to grapple with the overriding problem of creating a nation out of the manifold communities which constituted his empire. In doing this, however, he sought to superimpose a religious nationalism on his subjects, and his efforts ended in a substantial failure. And when, in the reign of his great grandson [Libna-Dingil, 1508–1540], Imam Ahmad Gragn broke into the frontier provinces, the *Christian nation* [my emphasis] could outlast the trying years of the Muslim invasion only where a very long history of ethnic and religious fusion had been effected, namely, in Tigre [i.e. Tigray], Lasta, Amhara [in today's Wallo], Bagemder, eastern Gojjam, and [importantly] in small isolated pockets in Shawa.

Taddesse clearly conceives of the medieval state simultaneously as an empire and a nation – a Christian empire and a Christian nation. The latter constituted itself over a long period of time – with Tigray and Lasta at first and then Amhara forming its backbone. The nation resisted tenaciously and survived the onslaught of Imam Ahmad, while the empire collapsed swiftly. The efforts to integrate the imperial elements with the core nation through evangelization had not fully succeeded. Thus the historical Ethiopian state (also called Abyssinian), as was the case of its predecessor the Christian Aksumite state (not to say of pre-Christian Aksum), displayed simultaneously nationhood and empirehood. The historic Ethiopian state thus looks like a sphinx, deservedly eliciting such paradoxical observations as this (Jesman 1963: 10): 'Ethiopia is the oldest African country, yet in many respects it is *in* Africa, rather than *of* Africa [italics in original]. This is due to its location.'

Location is not merely geographic. It means access to and interaction with other civilizations. The Aksumite state (that crucible of the historic Ethiopian state), although located in sub-Saharan Africa, partook of the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean world and, consequently, accepted Christianity as far back as the fourth century. Church and state then operated together, although not necessarily always hand in glove, to forge over time, and particularly since the sixth century, a state primarily based on a well-developed nationhood. This is the uniqueness (the non-Africanness, if you like) in the history of *historic* Ethiopian

statehood. Otherwise, even this historic state was African – except, possibly, for its endowment with an ecology conducive to plough agriculture.

The historic Ethiopian state (or Abyssinia), as it consolidated itself during the medieval period, had the Tigray (speaking Tigrigna), the Christian Agaw (speaking Agawigna) and the Amhara (speaking Amharic) as its core and as the components of its nationhood, although the Tigray and the Amhara were preponderant. The secular court language was Amharic. The language of liturgy and (clerical) education was, however, Ge'ez – one of the legacies of the Aksumite civilization (along with monarchy, the Ethiopic script, Christianity and architecture). The uniting or core culture (or the source of identity) consisted of common history and Christianity, not Amharic or the Amhara core culture as Clapham thinks. The monarchy was a common institution of the nation – i.e. it was not an instrument of political domination of the elite of one linguistic group over the others. The political system essentially rested on a balance of interests of the monarchy (the royal court) and the regional or local ruling houses. The autonomy of the latter was probably a chronic source of centrifugal tendencies (Taddesse 1972: 97). It is equally argued, however, that the *makuanint* class displayed the double traits of centripetality and centrifugality, the former being, historically, the predominant trait, even during one of the nadirs of Ethiopian statehood called the *Zamana Masafint* (1769–1855) or the *Were Seh Mesfinat* (1786–1855) (Shiferaw Bekele 1990a: 68). How was this possible?

As Markakis (1974) correctly observes, the social structure of the historic Christian nation (or Abyssinia) 'represents the classic trinity of noble, priest and peasant'. The monarchy, during the moments of its unquestioned authority, expressed the unity of the three – the trinity. The attendant peace and security were as beneficial to the peasantry as they were to the nobility and the clergy. The peasantry had free access to land (through the village community or the *rist* form of land tenure) and therefore did not depend on the nobility for its livelihood. But it depended on the clergy for its spiritual needs (that would, in time, acquire a force of cultural habit) and on the monarchy (and, hence, on the nobility or *makuanint*), in order to be able to go about its business in peace and security. The nobility and the clergy, on the other hand, depended on tribute (*gibir*) paid by the peasantry on account of the rights of 'taxation' bestowed on them by the monarchy. Consequently, their rights over the peasantry were bounded by the power of the

monarchy as well as by the freedom of the peasantry. The monarchs, in turn, depended on the nobility and clergy to hold the kingdom together. Apart from political rights, kinship or linguistic affiliations underwrote the relations between the peasantry and its *makuanint* – which monarchs had to take note of in appointments and dismissals (*shumshir*). The resources extracted from the peasantry also circulated within the polity. Thus the trinity strikes us as a holistic edifice of interlocking relationships. The whole edifice rested on peasant labour. In this system, within the nation, no particular linguistic group could impose itself on another; political domination or forceful assimilation into another linguistic and secular-cultural group (or forceful denial of identity) was also ruled out. It is to this characteristic of the nation, as I understand it, that Pausewang (1983: 30–2) essentially refers when he identifies an inbuilt ‘balance of power’ in the *rist* system:

Despite abuse, and notwithstanding class differentiation and social stratification, the *rist* system implied a balance of power among the emperor, nobility and peasantry. This balance was stable in the sense that it did not allow any sector permanent growth in power at the expense of the others. Resources redistributed through *rist* and *gult* rights were kept mainly within the peasant society, so that sufficient wealth could not be accumulated outside the system to pose a challenge to it. Within the limits of temporary power, mutual dependence allowed peasants to check the privileges of the nobility and to prevent major infringements of their rights and resources.

It is this polity that Taddesse refers to as the ‘Christian nation’ and Gebru refers to as ‘Abyssinia’ or ‘Christian Abyssinia’.

The role of the peasantry in the polity was not merely that of being the source of tribute or labour. The peasantry was a cultural force as well. The elite, secular or clerical, intermarried and intermingled. They partook of the court culture, including learning, and used Amharic as a matter of practical necessity. True ‘ethnic and cultural fusion’, therefore, took place only at the level of the elite. In so doing, however, the Tigrean noble or cleric, for example, did not cease to be Tigrean and become an Amhara. He would be underpinned by the language and culture of the Tigrean peasantry, with whom he had to live and interact a great deal more than with the court or his counterparts from other linguistic groups. The peasantry thus acted as a source of linguistic and

secular cultural diversity within the nationhood. Thus political and religious identity is counterbalanced by linguistic (and secular) cultural diversity. Cultural rather than political centrifugality was perhaps the characteristic of the 'Christian nation' or 'Abyssinia', not to mention the 'nation' at large; even the royal camp itself could not but reflect this diversity (Taddesse 1972: 274). Thus the 'nation' was not a nation in the sense of, for example, the English and the French under centralized monarchies. It is a historico-politico-religious rather than a linguistic and secular-cultural nation. I call this particular nation a *state-nation*, and its polity a *state-nation-state*. That it is so is accounted for by its past empirehood and the latter's positive resolution into nationhood via 'non-coercive' political and religious mechanisms. For the medieval and Gondarine monarchs, the Tigray region loomed large in their minds not only out of practical considerations (i.e. military) but also because it, to borrow from Taddesse (1972: 79), 'had long been the cradle of Ethiopian Christendom'. As late as the eighteenth century, royal rule of protocol had it that the governor of the heartland of Tigray was *primus inter pares* in matters of state (Guidi 1903: Vol. 1, 145-6).

We have seen, however, that the historic Ethiopian state also embraced peoples outside the state-nation. The state was thus not only a state-nation-state, but also an empire-state. The historic Ethiopian state must be characterized therefore as a *state-nation-empire-state*. This contradictory feature of the historic state continued, more or less, up to 1889, when King Menilek of Shawa became the Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913). It must also have been a characteristic feature of the Aksumite state, particularly after the sixth century AD. The state-nation-state, historically, spread or contracted spatially depending on its own inner capacities. It created the empire without dissolving itself through empire-building and reeled inwards into its core without disintegrating or disappearing. Reversals had always been temporary, thanks to the absence of lastingly or better organized other polities in the Horn. The state-nation and its state expanded themselves, however, not just by mere conquest but by converting, through evangelization and subsequent full political integration, portions of the empire into integral parts of the state-nation and its state. Thus the contradictory feature of the state was positively resolved. In case of adverse historical circumstances (as during 1529-1543) the contradiction found resolution in the collapse of the empire element, that is to say, negative resolution. Otherwise, every integral part of the state-nation-state had been at one time in the past part of an empire of the state-nation that first

conquered it (Taddesse 1972: 98–101).

Following the wars of Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (known in Ethiopian Christian tradition as Gragn, the left-handed) and the subsequent waves of Oromo migrations, conquests and expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular, the historic Ethiopian state gradually withdrew northwards. From 1607 up to 1855 the monarchy and, since 1786, the *Were Seh Mesfinat* (see Shiferaw Bekele 1990b) completed the integration of the whole of Gojjam and Gondar regions into the state–nation. Thus what has been referred to as the north, in contradistinction to the south, or ‘Abyssinia’, in contrast to ‘modern’ Ethiopia, became historically constituted. Parts of Wallo, and Lasta-Wag, formed part of this state–nation. During the latter part of the ‘Gondarine’ monarchy and more significantly during the *Zamana Masafint* (literally the Era of Princes, 1769–1855) or the *Mesfinat* era (1786–1855), the jurisdiction of the state practically corresponded territorially with geographic limits of the state–nation. At the root of it all appears to have been the drastic institutional deviation from the historical pattern that occurred when the *Mesfinat* replaced, in all but name, the monarchy. The period of the *Zamana Masafint* or the *Mesfinat* can therefore be considered a nadir for the historic Ethiopian statehood.

The Christian Amhara communities in northern Shawa, now cut off effectively by the Oromo from the state–nation, evolved separately their own political institution, the Shawan dynasty, particularly during the course of the eighteenth century. By the reign of Sahla-Silasse (1813–1847) Shawa had developed into a distinctly independent kingdom. Christianity did survive in Shawa, but common history and statehood with the north had been lost. Even in religion, Shawa had moved doctrinally farther away from the mainstream dogma of the Orthodox Church.

Kasa Haylu of Quara or Gondar overthrew the *Mesfinat* in 1853 and restored the monarchy when he assumed the throne under the name of Tewodros II, King of Kings of Ethiopia (1855–1868). Tewodros swiftly moved against Wallo (the medieval Amhara) and the Shawan kingdom in 1855, thus temporarily bringing both into the fold of the state–nation–state. The reign of Tewodros could be said, therefore, to have ushered in a new period of *re-formation* of the historic state–nation which, given the disuse of the monarchy, appears to have suffered from a relatively greater degree of political centrifugality. The Tewodros phenomenon (see Rubenson 1966) could be regarded as a simultaneous response to both internal and external conditions. Inter-

nally, he sought to rebuild the monarchy and reunify the regions (Shawa and Wallo) which he would have understood as the integral parts of the historic state–nation and its state. Externally, Tewodros strove to be able to ward off the military threat posed by Muhammad Ali's Egypt, already present in the Sudan. Otherwise, Tewodros appears to have adhered remarkably to the time-tested tradition of the monarchy in the appointment of governors – i.e. reliance on regional notables or ruling families, although time did not allow him to evolve a court along the same tradition (see, for example, Gabra-Silasse 1959: 50–1). In this sphere, Tewodros did not show a centralizing zeal that could be said to differ markedly from that of the medieval period. At any rate, as Bahru Zewde (1991: 32) observes, 'Tewodros's commitment to military reform was less equivocal than his administrative policies [read vision and measures].' But his vision of the necessity to build a standing 'national' army was more externally stimulated and he could not equivocate on this question given his knowledge of the Egyptian army, and his conviction of the imminent danger of being invaded by it. At any rate, no one can argue acceptably that Tewodros's need for a national army was dictated by the necessity to deal with internal problems. The most important point is that Tewodros, in his vision as well as in his acts, emerges as a national of the state–nation, and not as a man of Quara or Gondar out to impose regional despotism.

The problem of legitimacy, the political inertia spawned by the *Mesfinat* era, and, above all, the intractable task of reconciling external stimuli with internal conditions together conspired to defeat Tewodros utterly well before the British *coup de grâce* of 1868. Yohannes IV of Tigray (1872–1889), the ultimate successor of Tewodros, exhibits the same traits. Militarily, Yohannes was much more powerful than Tewodros. But he used his military strength to defend the state–nation against foreign invaders (Egyptians, Italians and Mahdists) rather than for a brutal subjugation of what he considered component regions of the state–nation. Yohannes allowed vassal kings to operate in Shawa and Gojjam, the office of the latter being his own creation. Both in 1878 and 1882, Yohannes opted for a peaceful political settlement of his differences with the vassal king of Shawa, although his military superiority was unquestioned (Cf. Zewde Gabre-Selassie 1975: 92–3). Even in late 1888, when Menilek's belligerent posture clearly demanded a military response, Yohannes opted to deal first with the Mahdists (who had sacked the town of Gondar and retreated) rather than engage in a civil war, which could have exposed the state–nation

to successful foreign aggression. Yohannes, as had Tewodros, also worked, in his case successfully, to unite the Orthodox Church around the *Tawahido* doctrine. The basic differences between the two monarchs appear to be only that Tewodros gave in too much to external pressures in solving internal problems, whereas Yohannes approached internal problems consistently from the standpoint of the traditions of the state-nation. For Yohannes, as for Tewodros, Shawa, Gojjam, Gondar, and Lasta-Wag were as much parts of the 'Christian nation' as was Tigray. The traditional vision of the state-nation, and probably Christian tradition about historic Amhara, seems to explain his coercive conversion of the Muslims of Wallo, particularly the chiefs, to Christianity. Essentially, therefore, whatever centralization of power Tewodros and Yohannes desired to achieve and did achieve was wholly premised on the indivisible identity of the state-nation, rather than the supremacy of one component over the rest. They thus perceived and operated very much within the traditions of the historic state-nation-state.

Yohannes died at Matamma fighting against the Mahdists in 1889. Menilek immediately declared his ascent to the Ethiopian throne. By 1889, Menilek, as the king of Shawa, had conquered the upper Cibbe region, most of Wallaga, highland Hararge, and all of Gurageland. He had thus built an empire. Menilek, unlike Tewodros and Yohannes, depended on the material resources of his empire and his decade-long friendship with Italy (1878-1889) to assume the throne. Except for a futile resistance by Tigray, Menilek imposed his authority over the state-nation with little difficulty. Menilek depended on his empire, further enlarged to the limits of 'modern' Ethiopia (except Eritrea) between 1889 and 1900, both to assume his throne and maintain supremacy in Ethiopian politics (Pausewang 1983: 34).

The historic significance of Menilek's assumption of the throne is not personal. His assumption of the throne meant a shift of political power to a dynasty, appropriately called the Shawa dynasty, that developed outside and independently of the state-nation. The Shawan kingdom had also struggled for its independence against the state-nation-state. Thus the political power of Menilek, as an Ethiopian emperor, depended on the resources of his empire rather than on the political, moral and material support of the state-nation. The state-nation, now politically subjugated, became a component of an empire rather than the builder of one. It is clear therefore that the Shawan dynasty *empirized* the state-nation-state and, hence, worked towards

denationalization of the state–nation. The historic contradiction of the state–nation–empire–state had now resolved itself into an *empire–state*, with northern Shawa alone occupying the status of state–nationhood. Thus Ethiopian statehood had *mutated*, a basic fact that Gebru tries to grasp through his conception of ‘discontinuities’. The empire–state (Clapham’s ‘new Ethiopian state’) which signed away Eritrea as an Italian colony by the treaties of 1889, 1896 and 1900, is therefore characteristically different from the historic Ethiopian state – the state–nation, the Christian nation, Christian Abyssinia, or simply Abyssinia – although it did not issue out of the blue.

The mutation of Ethiopian statehood was no less clear for Gabrahiwat Baykadagn (an Ethiopian intellectual from Tigray), a keen contemporary observer of the problems of Ethiopian statehood. Except for Taytu, Menilek’s wife, Menilek’s court, Gabrahiwat (1912: 346–7) emphasizes, was completely Shawan as well as inherently hostile to the north – i.e. the state–nation. In his own words:

Who can doubt that the honourable lady [Taytu] loved her country and her people. Who denies that she rendered great service to the Ethiopian state? The people of Simen and Bagemder [the Gondar region] say that our country enjoyed peace and security during the reign of Menilek because of the positive role played [*birtat*] by Taytu Butul. They are right; however the reason is different from what they boast of. Had Taytu not taken a place in the Shawan palace, there would not have been peace in our country as our Shawan brothers would have tried to dominate [northern Ethiopia] and northern Ethiopians would have resisted [domination]. In the mentality of Shawans, since long past and up to the present, a bad person is synonymous with being a Gondare or Tigre. And they [the Shawans] would not have disliked to rule them according to what befits bad people, enslavement. But Empress Taytu stood up as the champion of all the northerners and prevented them from doing so. It is true up to now all court [literally palace] positions, and particularly ministerial portfolios, are exclusively in the hands of Shawans. All persons from [literally sons of] Tigre, Simen, Bagemder, Lasta [and] Gojjam [i.e. the core regions of the state–nation] are excluded from state decision-making [literally from state advice] because they are considered outsiders. Lacking in education, the northerner has not yet understood how humiliating this is. As a result, and because

he has not been humiliated in other spheres [local power, access to land?] he has placidly accepted [Shawan] rule [my own free translation].

There could not be any better graphic description of the mutation of the historic Ethiopian statehood into an empire-state. In relation to the state-nation, Menilek's reign meant *Shawan monopoly of political power* and, consequently, *complete political domination*. As in the past, Amharic remained the court language. It is, however, far-fetched to speak of cultural domination: Menilek did not have the preconditions to effect that. Neither can the empire-state under Menilek qualify as an 'Amhara-dominated state', because it also dominated the Amhara constituents of the state-nation, although perhaps not as much as those of Tigray.

The Shawan monopoly of political power continued undiminished during the regency of Ras Tafari (1916-1930) and the reign of Hayla-Sellase I (1930-1974), except during the five years of Italian occupation during 1936-1941 (Cf. Clapham 1969: 77; 1992: 104-5). What is novel in Hayla-Sellase's reign is that the monarch, unlike Menilek, succeeded in centralizing political power so well that his personal writ ran untrammelled from the palace down to the *chickashum*, the lowest unit of government authority. This was the case particularly after 1941, when the emperor succeeded in fashioning a modern bureaucracy, armed forces, police and a security branch. The emperor thus routed the regional ruling houses. By and large, Shawan governors replaced the regional ruling houses (Clapham 1992: 103). The modern state apparatus, increasingly staffed by 'commoners', politically undercut the Shawan aristocracy, but its material interests were maintained. The new state apparatus itself remained, particularly as regards commanding posts, a preserve of Shawans, whether commoners or not. The innovation here is the increasingly enhanced role modern education came to occupy as a requirement for senior and intermediate posts, particularly after 1960. But the state apparatus and its personnel had primarily the task of upholding and ensuring the indivisibility of the power and authority of the autocrat.

The ideologies of the imperial regime strove verbally to portray Ethiopia as a nation state. As early as 1942, Emperor Hayla-Sellase (1944: 206) himself defined being Ethiopian as including 'the Christian and the Muslim, and the Amhara, and the Galla [meaning the Oromo], and the others.' Practice spoke otherwise: continuity of the empire-

state under the façade of a nation-state. In fact, the regime of Emperor Hayla-Sellase strove, in the name of Ethiopian unity, to erase the identities of non-Amhara nations and nationalities. In the process, the state-nation was further denationalized – the Tigray, in particular, being further isolated, not least on account of their linguistic distinctness in relation to the Amhara. Amharic and the Amhara culture now became the essential attributes of being an Ethiopian. The contradictions generated by a monopoly of political power were thus further aggravated by cultural domination or national oppression. To this extent, the empire-state under Hayla-Sellase can rightly be characterized as an 'Amhara-dominated state'. It certainly was not an 'Abyssinian'-dominated state. The peoples of the south still suffered comprehensive domination – economic, political and national. The ruling class subjected the Amhara peasantry to class oppression and neglect. The political system had little capacity to open up for the urban classes and social groups. The state increasingly became suspended in the air (Cf. Clapham 1992: 103, 104). The crisis of Ethiopian statehood under Hayla-Sellase cannot really be reduced to the north versus the south, nor to the Amhara ruling class (let alone Amhara) versus the rest, but stems largely from the nature of the Shawan aristocracy itself.

The Shakespearian 'to be or not to be' aptly characterizes contemporary Ethiopian politics. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the future survival of Ethiopian statehood was seen purely in terms of its backwardness compared with Europe. This perception engendered patriotic reformism (in contrast to conservative reformism), a novel political trend that pinned its hope on comprehensive reforms from above in order to catch up with Europe. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, patriotic reformism gave way to patriotic revolt, now propelled by the perception of Ethiopian backwardness compared with emerging independent Africa. This revolt culminated in the Ethiopian Student Movement (1960–74) which, by 1969, had propounded the resolution of class and national conflicts in Ethiopia as a precondition for Ethiopian statehood to continue 'to be'. The student movement (itself rent by the contradictions of the empire-state) culminated in the 'popular democratic upsurge' of 1974. The democratic upsurge in turn ended in a military dictatorship (1974–91) that sought to maintain the empire-state with mere economic (land) concessions to the peasantry in southern Ethiopia. The fundamental, historical contradiction of Ethiopian statehood was, in practice, wrongly reduced to the land question alone. Thus the state was pushed into 17 lethal years of warfare and up

to the brink of collapse and disintegration. The self-declared defenders of Ethiopian statehood turned out to be its grave-diggers.

The politics of the *Darg* was a continuation of the politics of the Shawan aristocracy. The overthrow of the *Darg* by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) on 28 May 1992 marks a complete break with the 100-year-old dominant politics (i.e. a negation of the traditions and political and ideological legacies of the Shawan aristocracy – a negation of the negation) and offers a new hope of the survival (affirmation) of Ethiopian statehood on democratic foundations: complete respect, in practice as in word, for the democratic rights of the *nations* and *nationalities* that constitute the state, as well as the democratic rights of its individual citizens, social groups and productive social classes. The agenda is not thus to resurrect the historic state–nation, let alone the historic contradiction of the state–nation–empire–state. The agenda is to create the broadest possible democratic conditions that would provide for the emergence, through democratic practice, of an all-inclusive state–nation: a new unity in diversity. This is the politics of 'to be' (revolutionary democracy) in contemporary Ethiopia.

The politics of 'not to be' consists, whatever the nuances or shades of opinion within each, of two variants: chauvinistic nationalism and a nationalism of withdrawal. Both, despite their apparent irreconcilability, are offshoots of the politics of the Shawan aristocracy (old and new). They share the same thought patterns and frames of mind: hate and exclusiveness. Both misunderstand, or cannot reconcile themselves to, revolutionary democracy – the politics of 'to be'. As such, both are hostile to the labouring masses (urban and rural) of Ethiopian peoples. For both, the Ethiopian world revolves (cannot but revolve) around *elitism* and the interests and perceptions of the *urban elite* (the *mihur*). For both, again, the historical role of the labouring masses (although not necessarily the conceptions of nations and nationalities) is a bogey leftover of the 'discredited' Marxist–Leninist era. The apparent irreconcilability of these two variants consists merely in the fact that the nationalism of withdrawal poses itself as a negative criticism and chauvinistic nationalism as a positive offshoot of the 100-year-old politics of the Shawan aristocracy. They are, however, twins. They need each other. They reinforce each other. Both work to complete the task the Shawan aristocracy left unfinished: the disintegration of Ethiopian statehood.

The Shawan aristocracy has left one basic positive legacy. It brought

together various peoples and subjected them, over a period of 100 years, to historical experiences emanating from a single centre. These common experiences have enabled, for example, the Amhara, the Oromo, the Agaw, the Tigray and the Afar to join hands under a single front (EPRDF) to negate the political and ideological traditions of the Shewan aristocracy. Why should not this new experience of common struggle become the basis for a democratic Ethiopian statehood – a state of Ethiopian peoples? The politics of ‘to be’ has every reason to prevail over the politics of ‘not to be’.

3. Hayla-Sellase: From Progressive to Reactionary*

Bahru Zewde

Perhaps all major historical figures are controversial, capable of arousing blind admiration or unrelenting hatred. If that be the case, Ethiopia does have its fair share of such historical personalities. Tewodros was depicted by some foreign writers as a 'mad dog let loose' (Moorehead 1962: 211). Even in Ethiopia, the Gondar clergy are not overly fond of him.¹ And yet, few Ethiopian rulers have captivated posterity as has Tewodros. He has been practically canonized. He inspired playwrights (Germachaw Takla-Hawaryat and Tsagaye Gabra-Madhen) and novelists (Abbe Gubagna). His horse's name, Tataq, was adopted by the Ethiopian Student Union in Europe (for its journal) and by the *Darg* (for its military training camp). And the EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front) baptized its most decisive campaign *Zamacha Tewodros*.

Iyyasu is another controversial figure of the modern age. Unfortunately for him, he was succeeded by a ruler of extraordinary political longevity who found it in his interest to have him portrayed in the darkest of colours. As a result, the charges of apostasy and frivolous conduct that cost him his throne in 1916 have stuck. Yet popular culture was prepared to view the teenage ruler with indulgence. And he was adored by peripheral nationalities like the Somali and Arsi Oromo, to whom he embodied a more humane relationship with the centre. It is

* This chapter was first presented as a paper at the Northeast Africa Conference of Michigan State University in April 1992.

1. Colleagues doing fieldwork in Gondar were told by some members of the clergy that their only regret at the death of Tewodros was that he left behind an issue, i.e. Mengistu Haile Mariam! Needless to say, they were talking in political, not biological, terms.

also this residual attraction of Iyyasu that explains the dramatic surfacing of his progeny onto the national stage in times of crisis: some of his sons fronted resistance groups between 1936 and 1941 and others re-emerged onto the national stage in 1974 and again in 1991.

No less than Tewodros or Iyyasu, Hayla-Sellase has also been capable of arousing violently contradictory emotions and sentiments. Foreigners in particular have been practically mesmerized by him. His League of Nations speech in 1936 continued to win international admiration. But Ethiopians, who would have preferred to see him die fighting, were not particularly impressed by his performance at Geneva. Nonetheless, it is a fact that he was regarded with awe and reverence by most of his subjects. It is equally true that the younger generation could only view him with a degree of resentment and ridicule almost unprecedented in Ethiopian history. The *Darg* inherited that resentment and practically wrote him off as a participant in the history of Ethiopia, much as he himself had denied Iyyasu any place in Ethiopian history. By the same token, it will take quite a while before Mengistu will cease to be viewed as a monstrous aberration in Ethiopian history.

All this raises a fundamental question. Will we ever see the day when Ethiopian rulers will be viewed as human beings who operated within the context of their times rather than as demigods or monsters? Or is the present going to be a perennial millstone around the neck of the past? While it is an inescapable fact that history can only be written from the perspective of the present, it need not be the case that it be completely subservient to the needs and requirements of the present. Ethiopia is indeed one of the places where an argument for the depolitization and deideologization of history is very much in order.

Fortunately for Hayla-Sellase, the years of his historical quarantine are now over and historians can engage in a sober and dispassionate assessment of his reign. This is not to deny the value of the studies of Hayla-Sellase and his government made so far. (These include, among others, Clapham 1969; Markakis 1974; Gilkes 1975; Marcus 1987; Bahru Zewde 1984 and Bahru Zewde 1988.) But for a person who dominated the life of a country for the better part of a century (and we are still living through the after-effects of his era), much still remains to be done to understand the full import of his reign. This is an attempt to defining the general contours of that reign.

Definition of Terms

The terms 'progressive' and 'reactionary' are obviously loaded ones.

The wisdom of using them might thus indeed seem questionable. But I think that, with due clarification, they can help us understand the ambivalent position that Hayla-Sellase has held in the eyes of Ethiopians. I use the term 'progressive' here to denote an individual or a group who has attained a more than average perception of the course of historical evolution and is actively committed to promoting that course. Conversely, the term 'reactionary' would apply to a group or individual who acts as a brake or stumbling block to the march of the times.

Underlying this definition is the philosophy of history that accords priority to society rather than the individual.² Individuals are shaped by society more than they are able to shape it. Great men there have been, but their greatness is not simply a matter of innate genius but also, and to a greater extent, a result of their operating at the right historical conjuncture.

What makes things a bit more complicated is the element of power, which is so central to understanding the career of Hayla-Sellase. For there was scarcely anything that preoccupied him as much as the acquisition and preservation of political power; it was a matter of obsessive concern for him, and the one constant element in his long political life. This fact explains why a man who was almost universally hailed as progressive at the outset of his career in 1916 was regretted by so few when he was toppled in 1974. Thus, when we say Hayla-Sellase was progressive in the early decades of his career, we do not mean so much that he stood for progress for its own sake, but rather that progress was a concomitant of his quest for power. Likewise, he can justifiably be called reactionary in the last decades of his power because his clinging to power blocked all paths to progress.

This naturally invites the question as to the historic moment at which Hayla-Sellase ceased to be progressive and became reactionary. It would of course be rather simplistic to pick up on a year and say *that* was when Hayla-Sellase the progressive died and Hayla-Sellase the reactionary was born. As we know, historical processes are much more complex than that. The two phases of his reign shade into one another. Just as his commitment to education was not altogether altruistic, one can discern the negative implications of his centralizing drive from early on in his career. For the sake of convenience, however, one can say that the 1950s mark the period of transition. Pride goes before a

2. I took this line in my 'Economic Origins of the Absolutist State' (1984) article and I have found no reason since then to modify it substantially.

fall. Pageantry, too, is a sign of oncoming decay. The international jamboree attending the coronation jubilee celebrations in 1955 marked the zenith of the emperor's power and achievement, after which the road could only be downwards. With this, we shall try to delineate the main features of the two phases.

The Progressive Phase

Before Hayla-Sellase I, there was Tafari Makonnen. It was as Tafari Makonnen, heir to the throne (and not regent, as erroneously described by many),³ that the future emperor laid the foundations of his power. The cornerstone of his policy could be described as the centralization of administration. This had both political and fiscal dimensions. Politically, it was marked by the systematic erosion of the power of the regional nobility. This was accomplished from 1916 to 1935 with such efficiency that it had an element of the inexorable about it.

First to go was the powerful *negus* of Wallo, Mikael, whose defeat at the Battle of Sagale in October 1916 became the prelude to the eventual conversion of his region into a province controlled by and benefiting the imperial family. The humbling of the fiery warrior, *Dajiach* Balcha, in 1928 was followed three years later by the appointment of the emperor's son-in-law, *Dajiach* Dasta Damtaw, as governor of Sidamo. The defeat and death of *Ras* Gugsä Wale at the Battle of Anchem in 1930 was attended by the appointment of *Ras* Kasa Haylu, the emperor's relation and trusted confidant, as governor of Bagemder. The extortions of *Ras* Haylu Takla-Haymanot of Gojjam and his involvement in the escape of the detained ex-emperor, Iyyasu, in 1932 provided Hayla-Sellase with the perfect excuse to do away with perhaps his most serious challenger to political supremacy and to entrust the rich province to his lifelong companion, *Ras* Emeru Hayla-Sellase. Finally, in 1934, the death of Abba Jifar II of Jimma provided Hayla-Sellase with the opportunity to terminate the autonomous status that the region had enjoyed since the days of Menilek.⁴

Following his return from exile in 1941, Hayla-Sellase rededicated

3. He was not formally designated regent (*endarasse*) until his coronation as *negus* in 1928. But he has generally been referred to as regent in the literature, a label which he himself has actively encouraged, and the period from 1916 to 1930, when he shared power with Empress Zawditu Menilek, has been dubbed the Regency.
4. The above, and much of the following, is a resume of developments discussed in greater detail in Bahru Zewde (1991: Chapters 3 and 5).

himself to strengthening the centre at the expense of the periphery with even greater gusto. In this respect the two pillars of centralization were the provincial administration decree of 1942 and the two imperial orders of 1943, which reconstituted the ministries and formally established the office of prime minister. It was with these legislative measures that the provincial administration and the central bureaucracy of our age were laid. Parallel with this went the creation of the modern Ethiopian army, a process already initiated with the establishment of the Imperial Guard in 1930 and the Holata Military School in 1934.

Centralized administration and a professional national army were what Tewodros had aspired to, but he lacked the financial base to make those dreams come true. And his quest for finance led him into a mortal clash with the clergy which eventually cost him his throne, and his life. Where Tafari Hayla-Sellase differed was in his ability to secure the financial resources to sustain his reforms. This was achieved through the progressive rationalization and centralization of land tax and customs dues. The abolition of *corvée* and the honey tribute (*mar geber*) in 1935, the land-tax decrees of 1944 and 1966, and the agricultural income tax of 1967 were successive measures designed to strengthen the hand of the central government in the collection of land revenue. Likewise, the Customs and Export Duties Proclamation of 1943 was a landmark, marking the culmination of steps towards fiscal centralization and the augmentation of government revenue going back to his days as heir to the throne and setting the pace for the future.

From the perspective of the 1990s, when decentralization has become the norm, it is of course difficult to see Hayla-Sellase's policy of centralization in a positive light. One is indeed tempted to wonder whether the relatively higher sensitivity to regional power shown by both Emperors Yohannes and Menilek would not have saved Ethiopia from the tribulations of ethno-nationalism that she is witnessing today. But it is difficult to sustain such a line of thinking. To begin with, the fact that ethno-nationalism developed to the highest degree in the regions least affected by the erosion of political autonomy, i.e. Tigray and Wallaga, casts doubt on the direct correlation between political centralization and ethno-nationalism. Secondly, and even more fundamentally, blaming Hayla-Sellase for centralization would be judging him outside the historical context in which he lived and operated. In the circumstances in which Ethiopia found itself in the early twentieth century, surrounded by colonial powers who regarded her independence as an anomalous and obnoxious luxury, Ethiopia had no option

but to subscribe to the universal norms of centralized government. It was to be the historical destiny of Hayla-Sellase to mobilize domestic resources and external support to this end.

An important result of this process of centralization was the remarkable economic growth and modernization achieved under Hayla-Sellase, particularly in the post-1941 period. A proper and thorough analysis of this process has yet to emerge.⁵ But it is evident to even the amateurish eye that Ethiopians under Hayla-Sellase had better access than their predecessors to the amenities of modern life in the spheres of communications, health, education and exchange. Sadly enough, it has also become a truism that Ethiopians, including the peasants whom the 1975 rural land proclamation promised to liberate, enjoyed a higher standard of living before the revolution than they did after.

On the surface, the emperor's achievements in the field of education appear less controversial. With some justification, he himself also tended to give it pride of place in his frequent evaluations of his reign. From the establishment of the Tafari Makonnen School in 1925 to the founding of the Hayla-Sellasse I University in 1961, he gave close and personal attention to the expansion of education. A cursory survey of his early speeches shows clearly how much it dominated his activities, from the founding of schools and the awarding of prizes to the formal send-off and reception ceremonies to students going to and coming from abroad (see *Fere Kanafer* 1944 EC).

Hayla-Sellase's interest in education was not purely philanthropical, however. It was directly related to the question of political power and centralization delineated above. Education was seen as a means of creating a new cadre of officials to assist in the process of political centralization and the consolidation of the emperor's personal power. Nothing illustrates this utilitarian approach of the emperor to education better than his relationship with the educated elite before and after the war.

From Harlem to Paris, the 1920s were a decade of artistic and literary flowering on a global scale. Ethiopia had its share of this intellectual effervescence, with Tafari presiding over a process of free discussion of national issues unprecedented in Ethiopian history. Through

5. It is encouraging to note that a group of Ethiopian scholars based at Addis Ababa University are currently engaged in an inter-disciplinary investigation of the Ethiopian political economy in the years 1941 to 1974.

numerous publications of the newly established presses and the weekly *Berhanena Salam*, Ethiopians engaged in an almost uninhibited examination of their country's heritage and contemporary problems in order to chart a better future. Tafari was like a prince of the Enlightenment, patronizing these early intellectuals, whom he valued as allies in his struggle against the traditional nobility.

But already before 1935, it becomes apparent that, as Hayla-Sellase achieved his objective of political supremacy, his need for the intellectuals diminished. His world then had room only for the loyal functionary, not for the critical intellectual. The locally educated, often combining traditional church education with a touch of the modern, gained precedence over the foreign-educated. It was the former who gained the emperor's trust and sometimes affection. They include people such as *Blatten Geta* Heruy Walda-Sellase, foreign minister, *Blatten Geta* Sahle Tsadalu, minister of education, Walda-Giyorgis Walda-Yohannes, private secretary during the period of exile and powerful minister of the pen after 1941, and the poet-playwright *Mari Geta* Yoftahe Neguse. Conversely, the foreign-educated intellectuals became progressively marginalized, as shown in the almost simultaneous ambassadorial appointment of *Nagaadras* Afawarq Gabra-Iyyasus, *Bajerond* Takla-Hawaryat, and *Hakim* Warqenah to Rome, Paris and Geneva, and London, respectively (see Bahru Zewde 1991a).

The careers of Heruy and Takla-Hawaryat epitomize the fates of these two sections of the intelligentsia. Heruy graduated from Entotto Raguel with a good grounding in traditional church education, which he then embellished with a smattering of English acquired at the Swedish mission in Addis Ababa. He won the trust and confidence of Tafari Hayla-Sellase to become, progressively, director-general of the Municipality of Addis Ababa, chief judge of the special court set up to adjudicate cases involving foreign residents, director-general in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and finally, in 1930, minister of foreign affairs. In 1936, he was one of the few persons chosen to accompany the emperor into exile. He died in Bath in September 1938. The emperor was so deeply moved by his death that, in his funeral oration, he abandoned the royal 'We' and made the second known relapse into the first person singular after 1928, the first being during his famous address to the League of Nations in 1936 (see *Fere Kanafer* 1944: 152).⁶ Takla-

6. The best biography of Heruy to date is Walda-Maryam Lamma (1963); cf. Tedeschi (1984).

Hawaryat was educated in Russia, where he was adopted by a liberal aristocratic family.

He was commissioned as an artillery officer and returned to Ethiopia after 11 years. He then had a shorter sojourn in England and France, where he developed an abiding interest in agronomy. He first pinned his hopes for introducing reforms on Iyyasu. Disappointed by the dissolute character of the young emperor, he changed camp in 1916 and, by his own admission,⁷ became a star witness in the denunciation of Iyyasu as an apostate. He was rewarded with the governorship of the strategic district of Jijjiga, which he converted into a model of modern administration. Although briefly detained in 1928 in connection with a Bolshevik scare, he was subsequently made minister of finance, the only foreign-educated Ethiopian to rise to ministerial level before 1941.

The 1931 constitution, which Takla-Hawaryat drafted, marked the high point of his influence. At the same time it signified the end of his utility to the emperor and his growing marginalization. After that, the emperor apparently had little use inside the country for this man, who had a reputation for being too outspoken. His assignment as Ethiopian minister to Paris, from where he could also double as minister to the League of Nations at Geneva, was thus on the part of the emperor a brilliant deflection of the ardour and critical intelligence of Takla-Hawaryat to serve the imperilled national cause abroad rather than let it occasion embarrassment at home. The Italian invasion found them at cross-purposes, the emperor preparing to go into exile as his minister hurried back home from Europe to join battle. After a brief effort to resist the Italian occupation, Takla-Hawaryat himself went into exile successively in Djibouti, Aden and Madagascar. Presumably to express his ire at what he felt to be a betrayal by the emperor, he prolonged his exile after 1941 and, on his return, retired to the obscurity of a gentleman-farmer at Hirna, in Hararge province.

After 1941, the emperor continued to confide more in the traditionally educated than the foreign-educated. Until 1953, Aklilu Habta-Wald and Yelma Deressa were the only foreign-educated Ethiopians (in France and England, respectively) to attain ministerial-level appointments. They were what we would call in present-day parlance technocrats, bringing in skills as well as loyalty to the emperor. They had a

7. As he confides in his unpublished autobiography 433ff, a copy of which is in the Department of History, Addis Ababa University. This resume of his career is culled from that manuscript.

clearly junior role compared with the two ministers who turned out to be the power-brokers of the post-1941 order: *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Walda-Giyorgis Walda-Yohannes and Makonnen Habta-Wald. Both, like Heruy, were graduates of Raguel 'Univerity'. In both cases, their service to the emperor antedates the Italian invasion. What all four had in common, however – and hence their attraction to the emperor – was their plebeian background. They had no independent base of their own and could be disposed of at any time, as indeed Walda-Giyorgis was in 1955. (For a still largely valid assessment of the post-Liberation elite, see Clapham 1969: 87–91, 98–102.)

The Reactionary Phase

It is, I think, apparent from the above that the progressive and reactionary features of Hayla-Sellase's reign are not mutually exclusive but tend to overlap. Power, which remained the abiding concern of the emperor, was their locus of interaction. His obsession with power in time gave a reactionary character to what at the outset could have been progressive measures. Political centralization negated the legitimate wishes of regions for internal autonomy. The armed forces became more and more instruments for preserving and defending his autocratic power. The educated elite were expected to be loyal servants of the palace, not independent forces of change, vertically attached to him but with little lateral connection among themselves, even at the cabinet level.

Having grown under his patronage, the prewar intelligentsia did not show much inclination for independent initiative, either individually or, even less so, collectively. The only exceptions were, perhaps, Takla-Hawaryat and some members of the younger generation such as Benyam Warqenah, the Cambridge-educated son of *Hakim* Warqenah. But, as we have seen above, his prolonged exile rendered Takla-Hawaryat irrelevant to the post-1941 scene, while Benyam was liquidated during the Graziani Massacre, together with his brother Yosef, the fiery son of Heruy, Faqada-Sellase, and scores of other young Ethiopians. Their liquidation came soon after the disbanding of the only politically motivated and truly pan-Ethiopian group of the Resistance, the Black Lion Organization, to which all three had belonged. Although it reiterated its loyalty to Hayla-Sellase and his family in its constitution, it is possible that, had the organization managed to survive the Italian occupation, the years of struggle and its youthful composition would have enabled it to play a significant political role in the post-

1941 order. As it was, on his restoration to the throne, Hayla-Sellase was able to exercise unfettered power.

The patriots were too disparate to form a bloc; the leading ones were either co-opted (like *Ras Abbaba Aragay*) or liquidated (like *Balay Zallaqa*). It was in such a setting that he consummated the absolutist agenda, the reconstitution of feudalism on a more secure economic foundation, which he had started before the war. Yet, Ethiopian absolutism showed little of the progressive potentialities of its European counterpart. From the womb of European absolutism was born capitalism. Ethiopia was scarcely capitalist even on the eve of 1974. Partly, this was a result of the absence of a national, even commercial, bourgeoisie. The rural surplus, which went to benefit mostly the landed nobility or the rural gentry, was either squandered in conspicuous consumption or converted into urban property. Partly (and interrelated to the preceding), it was due to the fact that Ethiopia, like other countries of the Third World, found itself in a position of dependency to international capitalism.

Autocracy became the unmistakable stamp of Ethiopian absolutism; and, initially, political opposition had as its target the diminution or elimination of autocracy rather than radical economic reordering. Even when opposition assumed revolutionary dimensions after the mid-1960s, it came about through the voluntarism of the leftist intelligentsia rather than the objective laws of class struggle. The first major plot against the emperor, the one led by *Bitwaddad* Nagash in 1951, reportedly aimed at eliminating the emperor and proclaiming a republic. The 1960 coup was intended to introduce a form of constitutional monarchy. True enough, the declaration of the coup makers also expressed a commitment to the expansion of agricultural production, but it was left quite vague as to whether this expansion was to come through a liberated peasantry or through a new rural bourgeoisie that would replace the parasitic landed nobility; the latter option was to become discernible only in the last years of the Hayla-Sellase regime.

Inchoate and nebulous as the declarations of the coup makers were, they nonetheless set the agenda for change: political liberalization and an economic reordering to benefit the lower classes. On neither grounds was the emperor prepared to concede. Political liberalization went against the exercise of absolute power he cherished so much. Economic reordering, which would have essentially meant a thoroughgoing land reform, could only be achieved at the expense of the landed nobility, whose loyalty was vital for the maintenance of his own power. Absolut-

ism after all was a concordat whereby the emperor guaranteed the economic privileges of the traditional nobility, who in turn surrendered their own political power, and those of the new landlords, who pledged eternal loyalty to him.

I alluded earlier, somewhat tentatively, to 1955 as the year when the emperor could be said to have reached the height of his power and achievements and at the same time the end of whatever social utility he might have had for Ethiopia. That was the time when, had the emperor not been completely blinded by his love for undiluted autocracy, he could have tried to arrange for a smooth transition to democracy and social and economic justice. Theoretically the revised constitution of 1955 was supposed to provide for such a transition. But, as is evident from the elaborate provisions for the rules of Solomonic succession, which occupy a pre-eminent and predominant position in the document, such a transition was predicated on his eventual death, which few people, least of all the emperor himself, expected to be in the near future. Hence the anomaly that the crown prince, who was declared as such at the time of the emperor's coronation in 1930, and whose succession the 1955 constitution was supposed to guarantee further, had to wait in vain for over four decades to accede to the throne. In the end, he was physically incapacitated before the emperor and the dynasty were swept away by the tide of revolution. The *Darg's* designation of the crown prince as a constitutional monarch in 1974 was little short of a cruel joke.

Eritrea was to show how costly the growing irrelevance of the emperor and the political order he represented was to Ethiopia. Without minimizing the complexity of the Eritrean problem, one can, I think, emphasize as one of its roots the contradiction between the autocratic order that reigned in Ethiopia and the democratic atmosphere that prevailed in Eritrea in the 1940s and which the 1952 federal arrangement appeared designed to protect. Although, as has been argued (notably by Clapham in James, Clapham and Clapham 1967: 387), the 1955 constitution might have partly been designed to resolve this contradiction, it went nowhere near doing that. It has become a common cliché now that the emperor's objective was to bring Eritrea securely within his autocratic fold, not to allow Ethiopia to experience the plurality of views that had been seen in Eritrea during the 1940s. This was on the levels of both policy and praxis. The constitution's provisions for civic liberties had so many legal qualifiers as to render them of little practical value; political parties were not even envisaged. In the

realm of praxis, the emperor's belated attempt to woo the separatists antagonized the unionists without managing to placate the former. Furthermore, the systematic corrosion of Eritrea's autonomy added fuel to the separatist movement and contributed to the emergence of first the Eritrean Liberation Movement and then the Eritrean Liberation Front. (These crucial years in the emergence of Eritrean separatism are analysed in great detail and with first-rate documentation in Sishagn 1991).

I write in my recent book (Bahru Zewde 1991: 202) that the emperor's 'obsession with power bordered on megalomania'. I still feel that is not wide of the mark. What is more, he had reached the point where he came to identify Ethiopia's fate with his own, to feel that Ethiopia had no life without him. Irritated by Takla-Hawaryat's constant refrain, he is reported to have blurted out once: 'You keep on saying "Ethiopia, Ethiopia." Ethiopia is nothing without me. Her fate is intertwined with mine. Don't imagine that Ethiopia will survive after I am gone.' (Takla-Hawaryat n.d.: 13) Another facet of this megalomania was the relentless pursuit of pomp and grandeur. His coronation ceremony, which by all accounts was an event of unprecedented pageantry, set the tone of his life. Later on, as the domestic situation became increasingly unattractive, he sought glamour and splendour abroad through his record-breaking foreign tours. The climax to a life that put a premium on pomp and pageantry came with the celebrations of his eightieth birthday, which many in retrospect consider another opportunity the emperor missed to make a graceful exit.

Imperial autocracy determined the nature of opposition. Extreme situations often require extreme solutions. This explains why the students, on whom Hayla-Sellase had so often prided himself as examples of his progressive achievements, came to harbour uncompromising opposition to him and the system that he represented. The fact that the emperor made no allowance for even moderate opposition meant that opposition could manifest itself only in radical form. Garmame Neway was the first such radical opponent of imperial power. He represented a clean break with the earlier intellectuals, who on the whole felt beholden to the emperor. The killing of the hostages held at the Ganata Le'ul Palace when it became evident that the coup had failed was testimony to the feeling of bitterness that had been engendered and a tragic foretaste of the blood-letting that was to be Ethiopia's fate in the course of the revolution.

But Garmame pales in comparison with the student radicals and left-

ist intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s. By this time, the impatience with an emperor and system that refused to give way had reached its limit. The absence (or tenuousness) of any generational link between the reforming intellectuals of the early twentieth century and the student radicals of the 1960s was to have a telling effect. Revolution was adopted as the only option before reform could even be properly considered. In any case, the emperor's imperviousness to all calls for reform scarcely left any other option but the revolutionary one. That explains why, in 1974, it was not only the *ancien régime* that was caught in total disarray; the proponents of bourgeois-democratic reform – such as they were – were also swept away before they could even be heard.

The Legacy

Hark ye! Hark ye! We first gave you this faith believing that it was good. But innumerable people have been slain on account of it, Yolyos, Qeberyal, Takla Giyorgis, Sarsa Krestos, and now these peasants. For which reason we restore to you the faith of your forefathers. Let the former clergy return to the churches, let them put in their *tabots*, let them say their own liturgy; and do ye rejoice.

(Trimingham 1965: 99)

Those were the words of Emperor Susneyos (r. 1607–1632), as he proclaimed the restoration of the Orthodox faith after his brief but costly experiment with Catholicism. He followed it up by abdicating his throne in favor of his son Fasiladas. The message is clearly conservative. But they were the wise words of a ruler who was not prepared to bleed his country to death for the sake of his own personal power. How myopic and self-centred Ethiopia's twentieth-century rulers appear by contrast! Few rulers in Ethiopian history had the power and opportunity that Hayla-Sellase and Mengistu had to mobilize the country's human and material resources towards progress and development. But not only did they subject everything to the consolidation of their own personal power; they were also prepared to destroy the country for the sake of that power.

To his credit, Hayla-Sellase's achievements far outshine Mengistu's in almost every sphere. It appears in fact that Mengistu's role in history has been to destroy practically everything that Hayla-Sellase had built

up. (That the former ruled in more difficult times is only partially attenuating.)

Hayla-Sellase's greatest crime was that he ruled for far too long – and he was not aware of it. In 1916, there was no prince better equipped than Tafari to bring Ethiopia into the modern world. Iyyasu had some progressive ideas, particularly on the vexed issue of national integration, but he lacked method and resolution. Tafari seized the opportunity created by the deposition of Iyyasu to inaugurate a reign marked by some important achievements in the spheres of administration, education and infrastructure.

But Hayla-Sellase failed to realize when his time was up. Given his enormous power, he could have directed some of his efforts towards paving the way for a smooth transition of power. But, 'He did scarcely anything to prepare the country for the future, whether along monarchical or republican lines; this fault remains his greatest indictment in history.' (Bahru Zewde 1991: 202.) His conduct in this regard was tantamount to the old egocentric adage: '*après moi le déluge*.'

And the '*déluge*' did come – in his own time. It brought in its wake one of the bloodiest chapters in the country's history, with many experiments in social and economic remodelling but with hardly any concrete benefits of lasting importance to show. The opposition that Hayla-Sellase's uncommonly long and obdurate rule engendered was a curious amalgam of nihilism and idealism. It was set firmly on an indiscriminate destruction of old manners and traditions and the inauguration of a utopia which existed only in the rosy writings of Marx and Lenin. It was not tempered by knowledge of the country's concrete circumstances, nor of its history. The moderate and moderating voice of the prewar intellectuals had been silenced forever by ruthless Fascist guns and Hayla-Sellase's policy of marginalization.

Unfortunately for Ethiopia, the legacy of that nihilistic and idealistic opposition is still with us. While its domestic inadequacy and the changes in the international situation have terminated the ascendancy of doctrinaire socialism, we are still saddled with the perceptions on the national question of the leftist opposition. To deny the principle of national self-determination is both unprincipled and impolitic. But to elevate that principle – which is only a working principle – to the level of creed and not to relate it to the country's pressing economic needs and the international context in which it finds itself can only bring trouble. A policy of conscious and organized *induction* of ethno-nationalist sentiments, as is being done in Ethiopia today, can only

conjure forebodings of yet another disaster. To emphasize the divergent and acrimonious chapters in the history of the peoples of Ethiopia while de-emphasizing systematically or even denying outright the cultural, economic, geographical and historical links that have bound them through the centuries is expressive of an overriding interest in destruction rather than reconstruction. Hence the need for a sober and dispassionate assessment of the legacy bequeathed us by the Hayla-Sellase era – in both its positive and negative dimensions.

4. Eritrea: Evolution Towards Independence and Beyond

Melakou Tegegn

Fragmented by history – real and imagined – pulled to the limits by opposing extremities, unable to stand on its own feet as a result of unceasing divisions, its future presenting optimism at one time hopelessness at another, Eritrea is the bone of contention for various claimants. Created by imperialism and then abandoned, played off by various mini- and superpowers and sought after by its neighbours, Eritrea poses a multifarious and multi-dimensional problem, a political hot potato for the parties involved.

The Eritrean conflict is indeed complex. Diversity of every description characterizes its internal dynamics. As a compound phenomenon, Eritrea can be seen as an organic whole, constituted by opposing aspects, compounded by regional and international factors that are unfortunately beyond the limits of its power.

One encounters a similar problem in the realm of presentation. Conflicts of political interests and objectives compel the forces involved to present the conflict through their own spectacles. Even the many foreign ‘observers’ who have written about Eritrea after guided tours through either side,¹ have invariably ended up expressing a view favourable to their hosts. An unbiased discussion, free of any sort of propaganda, which aims at being nothing but scientific, is needed to get things straight, however much it may raise the eyebrows of the politicians.

The Eritrean movement encountered a serious problem due to causes of immediate and structural proportions, its immediate cause being the

1. See Davidson et al. (1980) and Firebrace (1987), which are supportive of the Eritrean cause; and George Galperin and the many contributors of the *Soviet New Times* who are supportive of the military government.

utter failure of the Eritrean nationalist movement to forge unity, which culminated in the devastating civil war in 1981. The structural factor is the religious and ethnic diversity that, in political terms, brought some of the nationalist forces to seek identity with the Arab and Muslim world, and the reciprocal involvement of external forces, the Arab world in the main (see Erlich 1983).

With the outbreak of the revolution in Ethiopia in 1974 and the identification of the military government with Moscow, the Horn of Africa as a whole turned into a battleground of influence between Moscow and Washington, consequently giving prominence to the Eritrean problem. Moscow's involvement seemed initially to have changed the military equation in favour of the military government. The real cause, however, was the inability of the Eritrean resistance to forge unity even at the critical hour. The problem of unity lingers on still posing a potentially explosive problem in post-independence Eritrea. What were the causes for this disunity and what were the problems of the Eritrean independence movement? To provide adequate answers, we have to go back to history and discuss some sensitive issues that have apparently been considered politically taboo.

Eritrean Political Responses to Italian Colonial Rule

The Eritrean political response to Italian rule, whether resistance or collaboration, cannot be well understood without grasping the historical situation on the eve of colonization.

The process of Italian colonization, which culminated in 1890 with the establishment of Eritrea, began in 1882. Having an area of 119,000 square kilometres, Eritrea is comprised of four geographical regions: the highland plateau, covering about a quarter of the total area; the western lowlands; the Danakil region and what the Italians called *pendici orientale*, a strip of land between the highland and the coastal plain. These regions, distinct in every sense, are inhabited by nine different sets of people, having their own distinct form of social, political and economic organizations, languages, history and religion. Religious and political diversity had not only divided these peoples for centuries but also brought them in collision (Tekeste Negash 1986: 39).

Among these, the Tigrean people, like the other peoples of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Empire, were under a feudal social order. Power struggles among the ruling circles, particularly during the 'Era of the Princes', always had severe consequences for its peasant subjects. Tigrean peasants in Eritrea had suffered a great deal as they were

expected to provide the armies of the warring factions with food and shelter.

As the authority of Gondar as the political centre of the Ethiopian Empire declined, the Tigrean aristocracy, the main rival to that of its Gondarite counterpart, rose in prominence and assumed power with the accession of Yohannes IV in 1868. The Italian occupation of Massawa in 1882 coincided with the fierce rivalry between the Tigrean and Shoan nobility (for a detailed discussion see Kofi Darkwah 1975). Emperor Yohannes violently objected to the Italian occupation of Assab and Massawa, which were restored to Ethiopia following the 1884 Anglo-Ethiopian boundary treaty. Italian expansion northward to the Habab, Hadendawa and Beni Amer was not objected to. As the Italians made their way to the Tigrean highland after occupying Saati in 1886, Ethiopian forces under the command of *Ras Allula* ambushed and wiped out a force of 500 Italians at Dogali in 1887. Simultaneously, the supremacy of Tigray was waning in the face of the increase in self-assertion of the Shoan Menilek, whose increased fire power was supplied by the Italians. The death of Yohannes at the hands of the Sudanese Mahdists in 1889 ended Tigrean supremacy. Impoverished and afflicted by a great famine in 1888–92, Tigray could not resist the Italians when they began to occupy the highlands of Eritrea.

Central to understanding the Eritrean reaction to Italian colonization is Menilek's initial collaboration with the Italians. His eagerness to acquire Italian firearms undermined and weakened Yohannes's authority and enraged many Eritrean notables. The peasants had always borne the brunt of hardships and disasters caused by the different conflicts. Their attitude towards Emperor Yohannes's inability to put up a resistance to the Italian occupation of Eritrea was quite ambivalent. On the one hand, they were not prepared to support any more wars, on the other hand, they did not want their country to be occupied by foreign aggressors. Consequently, the position of Tigrean (Eritrean) notables with the potential to lead a resistance was weak.

The Italians launched a successful campaign of liquidating these notables that was carried out successfully (Tekeste Negash 1986: 41). By the time this campaign came to a close in 1890, Yohannes had died and Menilek was crowned as emperor of Ethiopia, tacitly recognizing the Italian occupation of Eritrea. It is against this background that both the Eritrean resistance to and collaboration with Italian colonization should be viewed.

The very few who survived fled to Tigray where they continued

their resistance (Tekeste Negash 1986: 41). According to Tekeste, these 'isolated acts of resistance represented the reaction of a fraction of the traditional elite whose privileges had been infringed' (Tekeste Negash 1986: 43). Whatever Tekeste's judgement, this particular resistance by the Tigrean (Eritrean) traditional elite served as a forerunner to the more serious mass-based resistance that was to follow.

In 1893, the colonial authorities introduced a policy of expropriation of land from Eritrean peasants to be handed over to Italians who were to be resettled in Eritrea. Designed to build a social base necessary for the colonial structure, it backfired as it triggered off a series of anti-colonist peasant uprisings in the highlands of Eritrea. One such, the Akele Guzai revolt in 1894, was quickly supported by the Ethiopian state. Its leader, Bahta Hagos, established good contacts with both Menilek and *Ras Mengesha*, governor of Tigray. Sporadic revolts continued until 1905 (Tekeste Negash 1986: 45). There was much expectation that Menilek would once again repeat his victory at Adowa over the Italians and liberate the highlands of Eritrea.

The ignominious defeat of the Italians at Adowa had, however, serious political consequences. Italian morale sagged and anti-colonial sentiment mounted in the Italian parliament itself. The cabinet even resolved to withdraw from Eritrea with dignity, and negotiations were undertaken to sell Eritrea to the Belgians. The Italians nevertheless maintained their grip on Eritrea by a new conciliatory policy, which was so successful that the Italians even signed a treaty with Menilek in 1900 in which they later recognized Eritrea as an Italian possession. As a consequence, as Tekeste remarked, 'To the people in Eritrea it became apparent that as long as this situation remained, resistance had to be planned and undertaken without the support of the Abyssinians across the border' (Tekeste Negash 1986: 48). As hopelessness and defeatism prevailed, collaboration began.

Eritrean collaboration was not inherently a betrayal, as was claimed by some Ethiopian politicians in the past. It had diverse historical as well as political reasons. Real and lasting collaboration came with the change in the structure of Eritrean society. Italian colonialism brought about commodity economy (capitalism), thereby effecting a structural change in the social and economic fabric of Eritrean society that advanced beyond the rest of Ethiopia.

One of the immediate effects of the money economy was the large-scale recruitment of Eritreans into the colonial army. By 1914, out of a population of 300,000, 'recruitment had reached a peak of 23,000 men,

including the 6000 stationed in Libya.² After the 1900 treaty with Menilek, Italy was certain that the Ethiopian regime was not a threat to its colony. Italy had become convinced of its firm grip by 1914, later than other colonial powers, which were firmly entrenched in their colonies by then. At this time, for fear of future resistance, the Italians followed a policy that deprived Eritreans of modern education. The real separate development of Eritrea began in 1914 and ended in 1941 after only 27 years (see Mesfin Araya 1986; and Tekeste Negash 1986: 76).

'Eritrean' Nationalism?

If Italian colonialism had brought the different constituencies that were later to form Eritrea, it is equally true that it together introduced a commodity economy and opened up factories, constructed highways and railways, built up towns, cities and ports. The implication of this socio-economic change in historical terms was enormous. Each ethnic group, with its own distinct language, territory and history, now developed further cohesion among itself, acquiring the characteristics of a nationality. If there existed a feeling of nationhood and oneness in Eritrea, it was experienced at the level of the ethnic identity of the different nationalities. Though it is difficult to assess the degree of this awareness of identity, Italy's policy of divide and rule reinforced the longstanding differences and antagonisms between the nationalities in Eritrea, including Baria, Kunama, Afar, Tigrean, Tigre and Saho.

The 56 years of Italian rule and the ten years of British administration had not abolished these ethnic distinctions and differences between the nine nationalities, let alone fused them towards one Eritrean nationalism. These differences were further accentuated by the defeat of the Italians, when Eritreans were left to decide their own destiny. In the 1948 referendum, the division was sharply along religious lines, which in effect was also along lines of nationality. The 1950 elections produced similar results. Eritreans did not have a unified view as to the disposal of Eritrea. Hence, it is difficult to speak of 'Eritrean' nationalism as such.

Following Eritrea's federal arrangement with Ethiopia in 1952, the political liberties previously enjoyed by the Eritreans during the ten years under the British administration began to be denied by the Addis Ababa government. By the late 1950s, following the continuous

2. In fact, Tekeste Negash (1986: 76) argues that 'Eritrea was only effectively colonized between 1935 and 1940.'

violations of the UN decision on the federal arrangement by the Addis Ababa government, it became quite clear that the intention of the Addis Ababa regime was to incorporate Eritrea into its empire. The disfranchized Eritrean elite displayed mixed reactions to the repressive policies and intentions of Addis Ababa. The Muslim politicians, who had all along called for independence, hardened their position, while a section of the Christian politicians, who had favoured union with Ethiopia, now joined the ranks of their Muslim counterparts. That particular political amalgam, though not a deep-seated reflection of a common viewpoint, was supported by a section of opposing political groupings concerned with what the destiny of Eritrea should be. As mentioned, this viewpoint was not deep-seated among the elite, let alone being deep-rooted among the peoples of the different nationalities.

Historical Background: 'Eritrea' before Eritrea

'Eritrea' as we know it today had not existed before Italian colonization. Divided along the lines of religion and ethnicity, the peoples inhabiting today's Eritrea were hostile to each other. The highland of Eritrea, however, had always been part and parcel of Abyssinian civilization. Inhabiting the northernmost part of the Axumite empire, the Tigrean people of Eritrea have always been kith and kin to the people of Tigray. The highland of Eritrea had been ruled by the Abyssinian kings centred in Axum and Gondar, as an integral part of this empire.

For the sake of political propaganda, however, this part of Eritrea's history is distorted, if not deliberately, by the ideologues from different sides. Bereket H. Selassie, a historian and once a spokesman for the EPLF, writes that 'the Eritrean people had stubbornly resisted Abyssinian attempts to rule them.'³ A few lines above, however, he stated that (Bereket 1980: 49), 'By 300 AD the greater part of Eritrea, as well as Tigray, formed the central region of the Christian Axumite empire.' Bereket seems to make a distinction between the Axumite empire and what he calls the 'Abyssinian' empire dominated by 'Amharas'. Tekeste Negash, an Eritrean himself, accused Bereket of distorting history, not even consulting Kolomodin's *Traditiones de Tsazzega et Hazzega* (Rome 1912), 'a thoroughly prepared collection of oral tradition of the history of the Abyssinian people in Eritrea.' Tekeste continues (Tekeste Negash 1986: 77), 'In the almost three centuries that are covered by the book, there is only a single instance of a conflict

3. Even the EPLF's own Bereket (1980: 49) admits this.

pertaining to the allocation of power between the Abyssinian districts of Eritrea and the imperial centre at Axum and later at Gondar.' Bereket's assertions are not only exaggerations but also unfounded. Ethiopian history is replete with fierce armed conflicts between kings and princes of different regions and rebellions and civil wars. If one uses Bereket's analogy, all the regions that were at loggerheads with each other must have 'stubbornly resisted Abyssinian rule.' The paradox is, however, they were all Abyssinians, including the Tigreans of Eritrea.

The objective of Italian colonialism was to create an Italian East Africa that would comprise Eritrea, the rest of Ethiopia and part of Somalia. What was an obstacle not only to this grand Italian ambition in the Horn, but also to the European colonial design as a whole in East Africa, was the fierce patriotism of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) people and their relative military strength. The Italians designed a policy to divide the forces of the Ethiopian emperor. Thus, even as early as the 1870s, they established trade links with Menilek, supplying him with guns in exchange for gold and coffee (Kofi Darkwah 1975: 96). By the mid-1880s Menilek and the Italians were allies, while Menilek's relationship with Yohannes was exacerbated to the extent of reaching a civil war proportion more than once. Yohannes resented this alliance, as he was sure of the Italians' intentions in the north of his country. With the occupation of Massawa in 1885, and with war imminent between Yohannes and the Italians, Menilek was in a quandary as to whom to support, for many of his own generals naturally supported Yohannes, since the Italian occupation of Massawa was an occupation of an Ethiopian territory. Menilek opted to mediate (Tekeste Negash 1986: 48).

Yohannes died in 1889 in a battle fighting against the Mahdists, who threatened to conquer his empire. Menilek was crowned as emperor of Ethiopia, succeeding Yohannes, and the Italians effectively colonized Eritrea, uniting the hitherto unconnected and hostile regions of the plateau and the lowlands. Eritrea is thus a creation of Italian colonialism.

The Defeat of Italy: The Aftermath

Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was met with a fierce and uncompromising patriotic resistance, although the reigning emperor, Hayla-Sellase, had already fled to exile in England. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Britain launched an East African expedition against Italian positions in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. By 1941, the

Italians were completely defeated by the combined forces of the Ethiopian patriots and the British, after which the latter reinstituted the exiled emperor and occupied Eritrea in accordance with the convention by allied forces to occupy and administer enemy-occupied territories. Eritrea thus fell under British administration, while the rest of Ethiopia regained its political independence.

It is important to note here the net effect of Italian colonialism. Eritrea's economic structure underwent a substantial change under Italian colonialism. The feudal mode of production in the highlands was seriously disrupted. Commodity economy under Italian capital made great strides forward, industrial and infrastructural development was substantial, thus making Eritrea distinct and advanced in every respect compared with the rest of Ethiopia. But as far as the psychological make-up of the population was concerned, the 50 years of Italian colonial rule had not changed regional and religious distinctions based on a strong feudal ideology. On the contrary, these distinctions were systematically aggravated by the colonial policy of divide and rule. Italians introduced, however, modern primary education on a limited scale, if only to meet the requirements of the colonial administration.

In terms of the emergence of new social classes, Italian colonial rule also gave rise to the modern working class and the petty bourgeoisie. The intelligentsia was extremely small with limited ideological and political scope. The consequences became evident later. As Tekeste Negash (1986: 47) noted, 'It could easily be foreseen that the future of Eritrean political consciousness and resistance were bound to encounter serious difficulties.'⁴ This situation, coupled with a denial of political democracy whereby the Eritrean people were forbidden to form political parties, clearly became grave, as the future Eritrean politicians had no political experience.

As we have seen, there had not been a political movement in Eritrea based on the unity of all religions and nationalities, nor had there been any striving for such unity. Eritrea's regions and nationalities had always been divided, a division that Italian colonial policy had further intensified. This had an important psychological impact: there had never been 'Eritrean' nationalism nor had the 50 years of Italian colonial rule compelled Eritreans to create one. This is a fact even some Eritrean intellectuals have begun to confirm. Mesfin Araya (1986: 37)

4. Tesfa Tsion Medhane (1986: 10) notes that 'Eritreans, including the intelligentsia, generally knew little about world affairs.'

says, 'In contradiction to the arguments advanced by contemporary Eritrean nationalist ideologues, the experience of the Eritrean domestic politics of the 1940s underlines a major historical point: Not even a collective oppression under a colonial rule for over half a century had produced any unifying nationalist tradition within Eritrea.'

Eritrea made a great leap forward in political development under the British administration. Their ulterior motives aside, the British allowed Eritreans to practise political democracy. They were allowed free speech and had a free press, the right to form political parties, hold meetings and demonstrations. During the ten years of British administration and political democracy, political parties emerged and Eritrean politicians gained a degree of political experience, however small.

On the other hand, the ten years of British administration was also marked by large-scale violence and political turmoil. Two factors account for these developments. First, the political manoeuvres by world powers, particularly by the USA and Britain, as to how to incorporate Eritrea within their sphere of influence. A number of opinions were advanced as to the disposal of Eritrea:

- To incorporate the western lowlands into the so-called Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and the Christian plateau and the eastern lowlands with the Ethiopian empire;
- To incorporate the western lowlands into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan while creating an independent Tigray state, uniting the Tigreans of the Eritrean plateau and the Tigreans of northern Ethiopia;
- To incorporate Eritrea as a whole into Ethiopia under the pro-western regime of Emperor Hayla-Sellase;
- To make Eritrea an independent state.

These options were advanced because of one fundamental problem – the disunity of the Eritrean people who, after the creation of Eritrea, had more in common with their neighbours than with themselves. The divisions along religious, ethnic and regional lines were sharp and the political parties that emerged were almost all formed along these distinctions. This disunity was the second characteristic feature of Eritrea under the British. Although the first factor, i.e. the manoeuvres by world powers, played an important and sometimes influential role, the decisive role as far as the disposal of Eritrea was concerned was played by the Eritrean people themselves. The most important political events in the late 1940s amply testify to this assertion.

Let us take a glance at these developments. In 1947, following Italy's renunciation of its colonial possessions in Africa, the Four Powers' Commission, representing the USA, Britain, France and the USSR, was sent to Eritrea to determine the wishes of the Eritrean people. In 1948 a referendum was held and the Commission found that the Eritrean people were split almost evenly on the question of Eritrea's future. Close to 50 per cent voted for independence, and the other 50 per cent or less voted for unity with Ethiopia, while only a few chose either union with Sudan or to stay under Italian rule. As these results were too inconclusive to determine the future of Eritrea, the matter was brought before the UN General Assembly.

As the dominance of the USA on the international political scene became unquestioned and the British sphere of influence waned, Hayla-Sellase's government quickly shifted its loyalty to Washington. US strategic interests in Ethiopia grew as the Red Sea became an important waterway because of the oil boom in the Arabian Gulf. A deal was struck between Washington and Addis Ababa whereby the USA backed Ethiopia's claims to incorporate Eritrea in return for allowing the USA to open a military base in Asmara.

In 1950, a UN Commission of Enquiry was divided in its findings. The majority report advised that Eritrea be federated with Ethiopia, while the minority advised independence after a period of UN trusteeship. By 1950 both the USA and Britain had shifted their positions on the question. From having wanted the partitioning of Eritrea, they now supported the majority opinion, i.e. that Eritrea should be federated with Ethiopia. Consequently, the UN General Assembly voted to that effect in 1950, and Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952. Addis Ababa accepted the resolution, according to which Eritrea would have its own government, parliament and prime minister, a national flag, two official languages (Tigrigna and Arabic) and its own police force. The federal government would be responsible for foreign affairs, foreign and interstate trade, communications, currency and finance. A federal council was also to be formed in which Ethiopia and Eritrea would be equally represented (Tesfa Tsion Medhane 1986: 15–16). Article 7 of the federal resolution (UN Resolution 390) accorded Eritrea political democracy, i.e. freedom of the press, association, worship and due process of law. An Eritrean constitution was drawn up, which among other things prohibited, according to article 91, the Eritrean parliament from passing legislation that violated the Federal Act. Thus begins the federal arrangement. What happened thereafter – Eritrean nationalism –

is crucial to our discussion. From the first days of the federal arrangement, the Ethiopian government began making demands that violated the federal resolution. According to Tesfa Tsion Medhane (1986: 21):

Representing the Ethiopian government, Foreign Minister Aklilu Habta-Wald urged constitutional arrangements that would have practically denied autonomy to Eritrea. He demanded that Ethiopia be empowered to appoint a Governor General and 'all executive officials' in Eritrea and to 'approve and reject all legislation'. He also contended that Eritrea should have no flag and official language of its own.

This attitude immediately antagonized all the Eritrean parties, including the Unionist Party, which sided with the Ethiopian government only on the issue of the Eritrean flag. The UN commissioner was also opposed to Addis Ababa's demands.

The Eritrean parliament adopted the Eritrean constitution drafted by the UN commissioner. The constitution provided the Eritrean government with an executive, a legislature and a judiciary. The legislature would be of a single chamber, the supreme court would have the judicial power, the official languages of Eritrea would be Tigrigna and Arabic, and it would have its own flag. In the manner of western democracy, the Eritrean people were to enjoy fundamental rights and civil liberties. Hayla-Sellase ratified the constitution and the Federal Act; and Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia, effective as of 11 September 1952.

Violation of the Federal Act by the Ethiopian government began almost immediately. Parties that had called for independence were continuously and increasingly harassed. By 1955 some prominent leaders of the independence bloc were forced to flee Eritrea and thus opposition parties were virtually banned. Tedla Bairu, Eritrea's prime minister, was forced to resign, being replaced by a more loyal Unionist, Asfeha W. Michael. The same year, Asfeha practically operated on behalf of the emperor's government; he reintroduced Proclamation 121 (24) with the objective of controlling the 1956 elections. As designed and desired by Asfeha and the emperor's government, the Unionist Party 'won the majority of seats' in the parliament. It now became easy for the Ethiopian government to legitimize its violations of the Federal Act. In 1958, the Eritrean parliament was said to have scrapped the Eritrean flag; in 1959 it replaced the Eritrean penal laws with the Ethi-

opian penal code; in 1960 it replaced the designation 'Eritrean government' with 'Eritrean administration'. Finally, on 15 November 1962, Hayla-Sellase announced the annexation of Eritrea, alleging that just the previous day the Eritrean parliament had 'unanimously' voted to abolish the federation and to 'unite Eritrea with its motherland, Ethiopia' (Tesfa Tsion Medhane 1986: 25). On 14 November, when Asfeha asked the Eritrean deputies to agree to the emperor's plan, armed soldiers were deployed outside the parliament to warn the deputies that they had better vote for union. With that Eritrea was 'united with Ethiopia'. What were the consequences of the violations of the Federal Act and the final annexation of Eritrea?

First, the immediate political consequence of the annexation was the abolition of political democracy and the introduction of Ethiopian autocratic rule. This antagonized almost all the political organizations and the entire Eritrean people. Although the Unionist Party and the Tigrean population of Eritrea had unequivocally opted for unity with Ethiopia, they had not chosen autocracy over democracy. Thus the unanimous opposition to the abolition of fundamental human and political rights.

Secondly, the method used in the violation of the Federal Act was basically and systematically coercive, which was unmistakably taken as an insult to the conscience and dignity of the Eritrean people.

In this way, Hayla-Sellase broke the previous barrier between the bulk of Unionist Party membership and the independence bloc, only to unite them against the annexation. For the first time Eritreans, both the advanced elements and the population at large, who had hitherto been divided on political, religious and regional lines, found a common ground: opposition to annexation and the affirmation of the Eritrean identity. A feeling of oneness was thus created which Eritrean politicians called Eritrean nationalism.

Of course, resistance nationalism is subject to examination and analysis. Though nationalism based on a justification of resistance had become the common denominator, there have always been diverse views on the future of Eritrea, among which unity with Ethiopia under democratic rule is one. Answers to the following questions will illustrate the diversity within the context of resistance nationalism: Who started the armed struggle? What were its motive forces? Was it mass-based? What was the sentiment at the beginning behind the armed struggle? Was it really a mass revolt? What were the conditions that intensified the armed struggle?

Now what were the characteristic features of this resistance national-

ism? In the first place it was not deep-rooted among Eritrean society; it was more of an urban phenomenon, where political activities were intense. Secondly, the unity of the previously divided groups was temporary and never deep-rooted, a fact which mainly characterizes this resistance nationalism.

Is Eritrea a Colony of Ethiopia?

Perhaps one of the most serious political problems is the thesis that Eritrea presents 'a colonial question', a theory that has been advanced by Eritrean politicians since the early 1970s. This theory had serious repercussions on two levels: on the diplomatic front (for negotiations, and so on) and in the relationship between the Eritrean nationalist movements and the Ethiopian left that supported the right of Eritrea to self-determination and the armed struggle. The genesis of this thesis was the earlier crisis of 'Eritrean nationalism' itself. Historical and judicial arguments were advanced to justify it.

Eritrean politicians have put emphasis on seeking resolutions of the Eritrean question through world bodies like the UN and international lobbying. The basis of their demand for independence is the historicist argument that Eritrea was a colony of Italy, transferred to British administration, then federated to Ethiopia and illegally annexed by Addis Ababa. Therefore, the Eritrean case should be resolved by the norms of international law. The Ethiopian regime has violated the federal arrangement drawn up by the UN; therefore the question has to be resolved by the UN according to the Four Powers' agreement on the disposal of former Italian colonies. The Eritrean question is thus not a question of secession but a colonial question.

The thesis themed as the 'colonial question' is counterposed to that of the 'national question'. In 1969, the Ethiopian Student Movement supported the right to self-determination of Eritrea and the Eritrean armed struggle. The Ethiopian left reached this conclusion after discussing the general problems of nationalities in Ethiopia within the broad framework of the national question. By 1971, the left as a whole had adopted a similar position, giving the Eritrean question political prominence. Presumably Eritrean politicians wanted to make it clear that the Eritrean case is distinct from the general problem of nationalities in Ethiopia when they advanced the 'colonial question' thesis. Nevertheless, the thesis was advanced two years after the Ethiopian left adopted the position mentioned above.

We presume the genesis of the Eritrean conflict is located within the

internal and external dynamics involved in the processes of state and, to a certain extent, nation formations in Ethiopia as a whole. The external dynamics gave it a peculiar feature, not only in appearance but in substance; the internal dynamics have played a decisive role. That is why the resolution of the Eritrean problem should be viewed with the internal dynamics as the principal factor. Eritrean politicians, depending on their ideological orientation and religious and political backgrounds, have given different dimensions to the genesis of the Eritrean problem. From the *Rabita Islamia* (Muslim League) to the present leaders of some Eritrean fronts, 'Eritrea is an Arab or Muslim country.' For the Unionist Party, 'Eritrea is an indivisible part of Ethiopia,' and for the contemporary leaders of the Eritrean movement, 'Eritrea is a colonial question.' Clearly, there is diversity here in the minds of the Eritrean politicians as far as the identity of Eritrea is concerned. Eritrea's independence nationalism has, from its very inception, been in crisis, and the changing dimensions of the problem, from national to colonial, amply testify to the seriousness of the crisis of this nationalism.

Eritrean politicians have always tried to prove their point with a one-sided reference to the foreign factor: Italian colonialism and a conspiracy by a London-Washington-Addis Ababa axis. As if no part of Eritrea's population had played any role in the effort to unite Eritrea with Ethiopia, Eritrean politicians relegate this internal factor. In this regard, we raise some questions: Why was there a Unionist Party in Eritrea and a strong Unionist movement in the 1940s? What about the result of the 1948 referendum? The 1952 elections? These are political factors deliberately ignored or conveniently belittled by the Eritrean nationalists. True, the official results of the referendum and the elections were not conclusive. The votes were evenly split between the independence bloc and the Unionists. The Unionists' vote came entirely from the highland Christians, while the independence bloc's came from the Muslims of the lowlands. Even if we accept the allegation that there was ballot-rigging, it is an undeniable fact that the bulk of the highland Christians voted for unity with Ethiopia for no other reason than they believed they were Ethiopians too.

Obviously, the disposal of Eritrea poses this particular problem; the highland of Eritrea (historically part of Ethiopia) was snatched by the Italians and incorporated into its colonial possessions along the lowland regions (Bereket 1980: 63). Therefore, as far as the highland of Eritrea is concerned, the act of Eritrea's independence, contrary to what

Bereket and other Eritrean politicians say, is a question of secession. As far as the lowlands are concerned, it is not, for these regions had not been part of the Abyssinian state. The colonial question theory therefore, reluctantly if not deliberately, ignores this particular problem.

Even if we assume that the Eritrean question is colonial, should automatic support of independence follow? Supporting independence in the case of Eritrea requires a lot of factors to be considered. Since independence implies a better life (not necessarily only economic) for a given nation, supporting its act of secession or independence when, among other things, its warring political factions were in a state of civil war was simply absurd. In the final analysis, we can conclude that supporting the expediency of the independence of Eritrea had very little, if anything, to do with whether or not the question is colonial.

The attempt to locate the genesis of the Eritrean problem in external factors and to seek resolution through a false theory such as the 'colonial question' is politically wrong and a distortion of history. But, and even worse, to extend this political viewpoint to consider Eritrea as a colony of Ethiopia is bordering on absurdity. If the term colonialism is not applied to all sorts of violations of the right to self-determination of peoples, irrespective of their stage of historical development, both within the context of nation and state formations, then Ethiopia cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be said to have colonized Eritrea. In the first place, Ethiopia could not be a colonial power *vis-à-vis* its own people in the highland of Eritrea. Secondly, even if we assume a colonial-subject relationship, Ethiopia is at a relatively lower level of socio-economic development when compared with Eritrea, whose level of development of commodity economy (capitalism) was much higher than that of Ethiopia. The motive of the Ethiopian ruling class in Eritrea was not extraction of raw materials for its own industry, which is a typical characteristic of colonialism, but a historical claim to a lost territory, though the legitimacy of this claim holds true only for a part of Eritrea.

Eritrea: The Regional and International Context

No discussion of the Horn of Africa can exclude the question of Eritrea. Since the 1977-78 Ethio-Somali war, the Horn has become a hotbed of contention where the two superpowers have waged their proxy wars. With the dramatic shift of the superpower-client relationship in the region - i.e. Washington shifting its support for the Addis Ababa regime to Mogadishu, while Moscow switched from that of Mogadishu

to Addis Ababa – the Horn has assumed a great importance in the Western press. The Eritrean problem, which had hitherto been almost unknown, assumed similar importance. With clear sympathy on the part of the Western media and the Socialist International to the Eritrean cause, the Eritrean question started to be discussed publicly. The president of France, François Mitterrand, called for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Eritrea; Neil Kinnock, the then leader of the British Labour Party, called the attention of the world to the Eritrean problem (Davidson 1980), while Willy Brandt, the ex-chancellor of West Germany, called for channelling famine aid through the Eritrean fronts instead of using Addis Ababa.

Within the Horn of Africa, everybody has a clear position on the Eritrean question. Opposing views on it are not confined to outside forces. The political forces in Ethiopia itself are divided on the issue. Let us start with the various positions of the political forces in Ethiopia before we deal with the attitude of outside forces.

First and foremost, the position of the Ethiopian left. It is necessary to emphasize the historical situation when the Ethiopian left adopted the position of recognizing the right of Eritrea to self-determination and supporting armed struggle. Ethiopia's modern working class was so small that one can hardly speak of an Ethiopian industrial proletariat. There was no political party, no political tradition of organized movements, no civil liberties, and absolute rule by the feudal autocracy. The left, however minuscule, thus used the student movement as its mouthpiece. At the level of a student movement, the left was not at the beginning in a position to establish solidarity with the Eritrean movement.

The left's position was made clear in an article by Walleign Mekonnen in *Struggle* in November 1969. The article threw the ruling class into turmoil, which led to the subsequent student massacre on 29 December 1969. Differences had already appeared in the ranks of the left. A fierce ideological struggle erupted abroad with a biting critique by 'Tilahun Takele' (1970) (a pen name used by the group of ex-ESUNA militants exiled in Algeria) on the position of the Ethiopian Students' Union in North America, which denied the recognition of the right to self-determination of nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, and which declined to support the struggle of the Eritrean people. Tilahun Takele set the standard opinion of the left on Eritrea and was more emphatic and positive towards the movement than Walleign.

The stand of Tilahun Takele (and of the left in general) on Eritrea was, like that on the national question in Ethiopia, based on the

absolutism of the Bolshevik theory of the national question. Neither political nor historical analysis of the background of the conflict was made. Although the limitations of the Eritrean movement for not being Marxist-Leninist were underlined, no critical assessment of it was made. In 1977, the EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party), the main left organization, supported the independence of Eritrea.

Subsequently, this 'all positive' attitude of the left was to cause troubles, both in the left's relationship with the Eritrean movements that demanded too much from it, and within its own ranks. Despite the insistence of the Eritreans on their demands and sometimes a display of hostility towards the Ethiopian left, the left had steadfastly stood on the side of the movement right up to its demise. Its weaknesses notwithstanding, the Ethiopian left had displayed the greatest firmness of purpose in its position on Eritrea and the national question in general. It had paid dearly, both under the emperor's and the military's regimes.

Apart from the left, practically all organizations bearing the label 'national liberation front' support the claims of the Eritrean movement. This position basically emanates from their attitudes based on the negation of an 'Ethiopia' which, according to them, should be reduced to the size of two or three Amhara provinces.

The military government's chauvinism was glaringly displayed in the light of its policies on Eritrea. The historical claims it made and its arguments were fundamentally the same as that of the *ancien régime*. What made its pronouncements different was the political language it used and a certain amount of window dressing put forward as 'solutions'. According to this regime, the Eritrean people had been oppressed by feudalism and imperialism, but these two bastions of national oppression had gone and the central government was destined to bring about 'socialist' construction. The Eritrean people, therefore, have no reason to fight. Clearly, this view fundamentally and deliberately overlooks the basic reasons for the beginning of the resistance. A brief outline of the background of the military government's attitude towards Eritrea might be helpful here.

Following the overthrow of the emperor's government in 1974, General Aman Andom, an Eritrean, became Ethiopia's head of state. Aman made a tour to Eritrea, travelling around and talking to the elderly. He then addressed a crowd of 80,000 in the Asmara football stadium. He played on the fact that he was an Eritrean, addressed the crowd in Tigigna and appealed for peace. Aman's speech and the fact that he himself was an Eritrean made a tremendous impact. A regime

headed by an Eritrean did not want to continue the war in Eritrea and genuine sentiments in favour of settlement of the problem were created. The Asmara elders sent delegations to the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) and EPLF, who were then at each other's throats in a bloody civil war, and appealed to them to agree on a cease-fire and start negotiations with Aman's government. Aman was accepted by the general Eritrean public, both by Christians and Muslims alike (he addressed Muslim crowds in Arabic, which had a positive impact), which turned out to be a diplomatic coup against the two fronts. The two fronts were politically in real trouble as the public pressure on them for a peaceful settlement was enormous.

Just when Addis Ababa was politically in a most favourable position to resolve the conflict, parochial elements within the PMAC (Provisional Military Administrative Council) suddenly called for the launching of a military offensive against the fronts. Aman opposed this move and his opposition cost him his life. He was killed by the military in November 1974 and in February 1975 the PMAC launched its infamous offensive. The death of Aman and the bellicose policy subsequently adopted threw a great many Eritreans behind the resistance. Addis Ababa itself destroyed the greatest opportunity it ever had and, however paradoxical it may seem, saved the Eritrean fronts from gradual extinction. The indiscriminate anti-Eritrean terror campaign in the urban areas of both Ethiopia and Eritrea threw thousands and thousands of Eritrean youth into the folds of the two fronts. The EPLF, which had only a couple of hundred fighters, suddenly grew to a force of 3000. This process continued to develop until 1980, when the ELF and EPLF both claimed a guerrilla force of 30,000 each under their command.

In May 1976, the military government issued a nine-point peace policy to 'solve' the Eritrean problem. According to this document (Ethiopian Revolution Information Center 1977: 18), 'the people in the administrative region of Eritrea will have full participation in the revolutionary endeavour of the people of Ethiopia to found the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.' It stresses that 'the right of self-determination of nationalities will be guaranteed through regional autonomy.' The regime, however, simultaneously planned a peasant march on Eritrea, while issuing this policy, and expressing its readiness to talk to progressive forces in Eritrea. It has launched a series of large-scale offensives since then, the most orchestrated being the one launched in January 1982 under the code name 'Red Star'. As the military regime firmly believed in a military solution to the Eritrean problem,

the chance of a political settlement was murky indeed. With the establishment of the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, however, the regime came out with a new formula of regional autonomy for Eritrea.

The Neighbouring States' View on Eritrea

The states of the Horn of Africa are all directly or indirectly involved in the Eritrean conflict. The most important in this respect is Sudan. Sudan has been a sanctuary for the Eritrean movement for a long time now. Situated in a strategically important part of north-east Africa and with strong ties with the Arab world, Sudan is a crucial link between the Arab states in the Middle East and the Eritrean movement. It has provided the Eritreans with facilities, thereby becoming an indispensable element in the logistics of the Eritrean movement. Everything, from arms to food grain, entered Eritrea through Sudan.

The late 1970s saw Sudan deep in an economic crisis which neither the IMF structural adjustment policies for Sudan nor the ever-increasing privatization policies of the regime could reverse. Gradually Sudan was forced to rely on oil subsidies from Saudi Arabia. Economic reliance brought political strings with it, and as Saudi Arabia became increasingly involved, the Eritrean card became important in the relationship between Khartoum and Riyadh.

Sudan's situation further deteriorated with the introduction of the ill-conceived Sharia (Islamic laws) in September 1983 and the subsequent rebellion in southern Sudan. The Addis Ababa regime supported the rebellion officially led by the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) as it would serve as a bargaining point in any kind of negotiations with Sudan. With the overthrow of the Numeiri's dictatorship by a popular revolution in April 1985, Ethio-Sudanese negotiations resumed with renewed vigour. As the hostility between Sudan and Libya thawed, the troubled relationship between Addis Ababa and Khartoum did not improve as the Eritrean case was the most crucial in their relationship. Addis Ababa offered to stop aiding the SPLM if Sudan closed down its facilities to the Eritrean and other Ethiopian opposition forces. Sudan was desperate to reach settlement, for that would lead to a resumption of oil extraction in the south, which was hampered by the rebellion. The extraction, by experts' estimates, could make Sudan self-sufficient in oil. However, the pressure of Arab states on Sudan not to abandon the Eritrean cause was so great that Khartoum could not accept Addis Ababa's offer. But what bothered Khartoum

was the imbalance between the pressure exerted by the Eritrean movement on Addis Ababa on the one hand and the pressure exerted by the SPLM on itself on the other. The latter became stronger, putting Sudan in a more desperate situation. Clearly, Sudan was in a quandary to which it has not found a solution.

Though unimportant in terms of geographical proximity to Eritrea, Somalia played an important role in advancing the Eritrean cause. First, Somalia served as a pawn in Washington's contention with Moscow, with the narrow objective of weakening the central government in Addis Ababa. With the weakening of the state in Ethiopia, Somalia (and the Eritrean fronts) envisaged military success as a way to achieve its claims on the Ogaden (eastern Ethiopia). Somalia thus had a common interest with the Eritrean resistance. Secondly, Somalia also played an important role for the Eritrean cause on the diplomatic front. Third, it also supplied the Eritreans with arms and money, though the latter was merely a token. Somalia's narrow objectives have so far brought it to war with Addis Ababa three times. The last occurred in 1977-78, and was so devastating that the Ethiopian forces, supported by 20,000 Cubans, destroyed two-thirds of Somalia's standing army. Consequently, the military equation tilted towards Addis Ababa, and Somalia was in a disadvantageous situation, as a guerrilla movement instigated by Addis Ababa was harassing it. With the guerrilla movement's pressure exerted against it being stronger than the one exerted by the liberation movement against Addis Ababa, Mogadishu was in a very desperate situation.

Important in terms of proximity and bordering Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, Djibouti is a state in the Horn that has hitherto not been involved in any of the conflicts. Its population evenly composed of Afars and Somalis, Djibouti kept its distance from the two warring regimes and is protected by a French legion.⁵ Although its official position on Eritrea was non-involvement, Eritrean fronts had offices in Djibouti and conducted political work among Eritreans there.

Kenya is another state unimportant in terms of geographical proximity with Eritrea, but part and parcel of the regional conflict in the Horn. Due to Somalia's claim to the northern NFD region on Kenya, the latter has always allied itself with Addis Ababa. One of the paradoxes in the unprincipled politics in that part of the world was the solid alliance established between Addis Ababa and Nairobi. United in their

5. The French legion in Djibouti is 4000 strong.

troubled relationship with Somalia, the two states had remained, more or less, on excellent terms. For this reason, and on account of its own ethnic problems, Kenya did not support the Eritrean cause.

The attitude toward Eritrea of most of the African states was dictated by the charter of the OAU and resolutions of the second OAU summit held in Cairo in 1964. Following the brief Ethio-Somali border war of 1963/4, the Ogaden question became an issue hot enough to be taken up at the OAU summit. After some brief wrangling, the summit decided that member states should respect the boundaries drawn up by the former colonial powers. Eritrea, whose federation with Ethiopia was decided by the UN General Assembly almost a decade before Africa's decolonization process, was also considered as a natural Ethiopian territory. Moreover, since most of the African states are multi-ethnic with potential, if not actual, ethnic problems, they are fearful of being engulfed by nationalist movements.

The Eritrean problem is tied to the Middle-East states by many threads and is, as Erlich put it, more 'a part of the Middle East than an African conflict.' It cannot be fully understood without mentioning the involvement of the Middle Eastern states. The Arab states' attitude toward the Eritrean problem and the degree of their involvement emanates from the nature and orientation of each state. Some base their involvement on historical foundations, with the acceptance of the Eritreans' version of Eritrea's history, others on the alliance the *ancien régime* had with Israel and the military regime's alliance with Moscow. Very few, such as Syria and Iraq, base their support on ideological reasons, mainly on Arab Baath socialism (Erlich 1983: 55). Nasser's Egypt in the late 1950s and Baathist Syria since 1963 were the earliest supporters of the Eritrean cause. Until the Six Day War in the Middle East in 1967, the involvement of Middle East states in the Eritrean conflict was minimal. The aftermath of the Six Day War saw a change in the political climate of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa that had a direct consequence in the escalation of the Eritrean conflict.

Following the Six Day War, Nasserite militant Arabism and anti-Zionism was widespread. Despite Security Council Resolution 242, Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories only strengthened militant anti-Zionism. The years 1967, 1968 and 1969 saw a series of changes of regime in the Middle East. Despite the withdrawal of the Egyptian army from Yemen, the national liberation front in South Yemen came to power in 1967 with a militant political posture. The Baathists took power in Iraq in 1968. Numeiri, with the support of the

Sudanese Communist Party, took power in May 1969; Qaddafi took power in Libya in September 1969, and in October (1969) Ziad Barre took power in Somalia with a similar militant Nasserite posture. All these regimes, plus Egypt and Syria, turned either pro-Moscow or were in close alliance with it. With the new alignment of forces, Hayla-Sellase's regime, pro-US and pro-Israel, was literally encircled by militant anti-Zionist and pro-Moscow regimes. This gave an enormous boost to the independence cause of Eritreans. Numeiri's accession to power was particularly significant. The hitherto lukewarm support of Khartoum for the Eritreans became open and bold, and thus Sudan became a sanctuary for the Eritrean movement. Numeiri justified his initiative as a response to reciprocal support rendered to the Anyanya movement in southern Sudan by the Ethiopian government. Hence, supplies of arms and other war materials from these Nasserite states freely passed through Sudan to the Eritreans.

This period was also marked by two important developments inside Ethiopia itself. First, the emperor's government intensified repression in Eritrea culminating in a campaign of terror against civilians. The Israeli-trained commandos committed atrocities for the purpose of terrorizing the population.⁶ On the other hand, the ever-increasing militant and anti-imperialist Ethiopian Student Movement made a U-turn from its previous position on Eritrea (and the national question in general) and adopted a radical position on the Eritrean conflict by recognizing the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination and supporting the Eritrean resistance. Thus, the Eritreans' cause was in a favourable position at the end of the 1960s. At the same time, the movement also experienced its first split when different armed groups broke away from the mainstream ELF.

A major change, as far as the region of the Horn of Africa is concerned, occurred in the 1974/5 period. The 1974 revolution in Ethiopia broke out in February of that year. The revolution paralysed the autocracy's state apparatus but was prevented by a group of officers from

6. Erlich (1983: 58) quotes the head of the Israeli military delegation in Ethiopia at the time to have said: 'The second division is very efficient in killing innocent people. They are alienating the Eritreans and deepening the hatred that already exists. Their commander took his own senior aides to a spot near the Sudanese border and ordered them, "From here to the north - clear the area." Many innocent people were massacred and nothing of substance was achieved. There is simply no way the Ethiopian army will ever win the struggle over Eritrea by pursuing this line.'

installing a popular state. The officers' group installed a junta later in the year, thereby provoking the people's wrath. The new military junta was met with a fierce popular opposition inside Ethiopia which weakened it. It is this weakening of the state in Ethiopia that provoked the interest of the Middle Eastern Arab states and involved them massively in the Eritrean conflict. Coupled with this development was the reopening of the Suez Canal in 1975, giving the Red Sea area new importance.

The uncertainty concerning the direction the regime in Ethiopia would go in its relations with the two superpowers and Israel had continued until 1977. On 3 February 1977, Mengistu launched his coup and turned his government pro-Moscow. With that, Ethiopia was considered by the Arab states and the West to have gone communist, and then it was the turn of conservative Arab states to be anxious about being involved in the Eritrean conflict. It was at this time that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states began to funnel assistance to the Eritreans. In the summer of that year, the Somali government launched an incursion in Ethiopia and occupied for a short while the disputed territory of Ogaden. Already, Moscow had switched its position from backing the Somali regime to the Ethiopian junta, and Washington from backing the regime in Addis Ababa to the junta in Mogadishu. Simultaneously, the Eritrean fronts launched their offensives and occupied almost all of Eritrea except Asmara, Assab and Barentu. With the destruction of the Ethiopian state and the dismemberment of the country imminent, Arab states gave all-out support to the Eritreans and Somalis. The Arabs, and the Saudis in particular, then played a crucial role in the resolution of the Eritrean problem.

The Crisis of 'Eritrean' Nationalism

The leftist wind that blew over Ethiopia compelled nearly every political group to assume at least a pretended leftist stand. When the Derg proclaimed Marxism-Leninism as its professed ideology, the 'nationalists' had to appear not less so, otherwise their cause would lose the solidarity it received from the progressive world. The ELF and EPLF, with close ties with Moscow, were told by the latter that the Derg 'is a progressive regime' and that they had to adjust their objectives to find a solution within one Ethiopia. Even other parties in the west, such as the Communist Party of Italy, adopted an openly pro-Derg stance, telling the Eritrean fronts that they could no longer be considered as progressive while fighting a progressive regime. By 1976, the Eritrean fronts and the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) officially en-

dorsed Marxism and argued that they were more progressive and revolutionary.

Among themselves, the 'nationalists' were engaged in a fierce rivalry to appear each more progressive and revolutionary than the other. This was glaringly the case of the Eritrean fronts. The ELF adhered to the Moscow brand of 'national democratic revolution', while the EPLF opted for the Maoist 'new democratic revolution', with no difference in the substance of their respective political programmes. In the ensuing rivalry, the EPLF attracted more Eritrean intellectuals and students, partly thanks to the pro-EPLF propaganda made by the EPRP in Ethiopia. From abroad, the pro-EPLF student organizations in Western Europe and North America became very active, outstripping the ELF's influence. The Eritrean students' publications were as fiery and Maoist as other militant organizations at the time in Western Europe and North America. Thanks to the activities of these student organizations, the EPLF has ever since been considered a genuine Marxist-Leninist organization. At one point the EPLF claimed that the front was being led by a 'proletarian party' called the Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party, adopting the same initials as that of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. The ELF, for its part, also claimed that it had a 'proletarian party' called the 'Eritrean Labour Party'. In 1976, when the EPRP became the unchallenged leader of the mass struggle against the Derg, with a lot of support from militant organizations abroad, the Eritrean fronts were longing to be identified with the EPRP. The EPLF scored a big political point in this direction when it signed a joint communiqué in the spring of 1976 with the EPRP (Joint communiqué of the EPLF and EPRP, April 1976). Then it was the turn of the ELF, which was eager to sign a similar communiqué with the EPRP.

The Arrogance of 'Eritrean' Nationalism

All brands of 'nationalism' then, whether Eritrean, Tigrean, Oromo, or Somali, adopted an aggressive posture. They all became aggressive nationalisms. Nationalism adopts an aggressive posture when it becomes consciously hostile to solutions seeking resolutions through a multinational whole, when it consciously blinds itself to seeing the futility of secession, and sees multinational solutions as a threat to its fundamental interest.

Nationalism in general is incompatible with internationalism, and aggressive nationalism is, to say the least, hostile to internationalism, particularly of the left. It is this aggressive nationalism that is referred

to as 'narrow nationalism' in the Leninist school. Of course, not all narrow nationalisms are necessarily aggressive.

It is now high time to speak of what the Ethiopian left has inopportunely kept silent about for a long time: the exact nature of these 'nationalisms'. In a way, the left has erred in lumping all anti-national oppression feelings as nationalism without probing into the exact nature of these 'nationalisms'.

As we have noted already, there existed and still exists 'Eritrean' nationalism as a post-federation phenomenon. No doubt Eritrean 'nationalism' in general is fundamentally genuine. It sprang up as a result of the reactionary and repressive rule of Hayla-Sellase's regime. To that extent, it deserves sympathy and support. But what are the defects and undemocratic features of this 'nationalism'? Though these undemocratic features manifest themselves in many ways, let us cite the most important and dangerous of them. In the first place, this nationalism made no distinction between the Amhara ruling class and the oppressed Amhara people. It still treats all as enemies, thus its hostility to anything Amhara, even the Amhara left. The deep suspicion of the Eritrean fronts to the Ethiopian left, even to the EPRP that supported the independence of Eritrea at one point, has its roots in this blanket condemnation of anything Amhara or Ethiopian. Within the Eritrean movement, militancy was measured by how much Amharas and Ethiopians were hated. The EPRP on the other hand, developed a subjectivist view of the EPLF, considering it as progressive and even Marxist. Birhane Meskel and Tesfay Debessay were among those responsible for spreading this view. The EPRP, when it was still in the formative stage, launched a fundraising campaign for the EPLF, which was a very dangerous activity then, and collected some 3000 Ethiopian birr.

Secondly, 'Eritrean' nationalism is chauvinistic. It considers Eritreans superior to or more civilized than the rest of the Ethiopian people. Thirdly, it is not even uniform. Some, particularly the fronts dominated by the lowlanders, consider Eritrea as part of the Muslim and Arab world, and attend the conferences of the Muslim and Arab leagues, while Christian politicians have a more realistic view of the identity of Eritrea.

Emanating from this supremacist feeling, the EPLF's view of the Ethiopian left was outwardly arrogant, and it has always belittled the scale of the mass revolution in Ethiopia and presented it as something inferior to the nationality movement in Eritrea. In terms of socio-political content and depth, however, and in terms of concrete political

and structural changes, the Ethiopian revolution was far superior to the nationality movement in Eritrea. And the credit for these positive political developments and changes goes to the Ethiopian left, the EPRP, in particular. But the EPLF had to undermine and belittle the revolution in Ethiopia for no other reason than to 'prove' that 'the Ethiopian revolution is no match for the Eritrean struggle.' Thus, the EPLF's consistent use of the terms like 'the ongoing Eritrean revolution and the upcoming Ethiopian revolution' (see 1976/7 publications of pro-EPLF, *Eritreans for Liberation in North America*), 'the revolution in Eritrea and a spontaneous uprising in Ethiopia', and so on, without making any distinction between the left that collaborated with the Derg, even supporting its military campaigns in Eritrea, and the EPRP that consistently stood on the side of the Eritrean people. The EPLF still lumps all the left together and accuses it of chauvinism. Even in its 'meticulously' prepared 1985 statement on its relations with the Ethiopian opposition, the EPLF stated that the progressive organizations in Ethiopia 'could not get rid of their Amhara, great-nation chauvinism.'

As we have mentioned elsewhere, what the EPRP did with respect to the national question and the Eritrean question in particular was outstanding. The dedication its members displayed and the sacrifices they paid were enormous. If viewed from the angle of the general historical situation existing then, it is amazing to see an Ethiopian political party, the EPRP in this case, supporting the independence of Eritrea in 1977. Eritrean nationalists, however, were demanding that they still accused the EPRP of chauvinism. To this 'nationalist' rhetoric, none other than the EPLF's Bereket provides us with a living testimony when he wrote the following in his book (Bereket 1980: 46):

The attitude of the Ethiopian left to the Eritrean liberation struggle and to the national question has been confused at best, and deceptive at worst. On the whole, the EPRP's position came closest to recognizing the right of Eritrean people to independence, but stopped short of accepting that the Eritrean question is a colonial one. As regards the national question, be it in Tigray, the Ogaden or among the Oromo, the left has an equally poor record. The EPRP position, despite the progressive stand taken by some student supporters and a few members, has been negative, and in the case of Tigray counter-revolutionary.

The basis of Bereket's assessment of the EPRP's positions, which he characterizes as deceptive, confused and counter-revolutionary, is foun-

ded simply on outright lies. The EPRP supported the independence of Eritrea and was not just 'closest to recognizing the right' of Eritrea to independence. The EPRP recognized the rights of the Tigrean, Oromo and Ogaden peoples to self-determination up to and including secession and supported their struggles against national oppression. In the case of Tigray, says Bereket, the EPRP's position was counter-revolutionary because the EPRP was at war with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). For the purpose of propaganda, Bereket had to pass a misleading verdict on a crucially important historical act.

The Final Crisis: A 'Nationalism' that Never Was?

The nationalisms that we described above today face a serious crisis. Although the nature of the evolution of these 'nationalisms' has much to do with the crisis, the developments in Ethiopia also play an important, in some cases decisive, role.

For almost two decades now, the fundamental problem of the struggle for Eritrea's independence has always been the lack of unity among the nationalist forces there. Between 1972 and 1974 the ELF and EPLF waged a bloody civil war, only to be stopped by the appeal of the Asmara elders who, in the wake of the February revolution in Ethiopia, took a bold initiative in approaching both organizations for the sake of peace. Unlike the claims of the EPLF, the origin of the split and disunity between the two organizations was never ideological. Had it been so, the EPLF would have got rid of the late Saleh Sabbe, who had been the co-leader of the EPLF until 1976, for he was anti-communist. In 1976, the EPLF split and Saleh Sabbe retained the name ELF-PLF (Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Liberation Forces) while the Issayas faction adopted a new name, EPLF. Sabbe's ELF-PLF further split into two: the splinter group calling itself Eritrean Liberation Front-Popular Liberation Forces/Revolutionary Committee (ELF-PLF/RC).

Eritrean politics, particularly that aspect of handling differences and contradictions, is a replica of that of the Middle East. It would not be an exaggeration to say that all the Eritrean organizations without exception, despite the pretences of the EPLF to the contrary, depended on the Arab petro-dollar for their survival. Each, except the EPLF, has its own patron Arab state to whom it is bound with varying degrees of clientage. The Iraqis literally control the Baathist ELF-PLF/RC; the emirates are behind Sabbe's ELF-PLF; the Saudis now support the ELF of Abdalla Idris, and the EPLF is backed by many Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria. The division between the Arab states

has a direct reflection on the Eritrean movement, thereby causing irreconcilable differences. Thus the diseases of Middle East politics (mistrust, sectarianism, doggedness, fierce rivalry and intolerance) were transplanted into Eritrean politics. This constitutes the main factor for the disunity of the movement.

This disunity and rivalry always reminds the people of Eritrea of one of the most painful periods of the movement, the 1972–74 civil war. At no time had the Eritrean people been so unanimous on independence as they were in 1977, the peak of the movement, when all towns and villages except Asmara, Barentu and Assab were under the control of the ELF and EPLF; even Massawa being controlled by the EPLF for a brief period. And at no time had the Eritrean people been so anxious about unity through fear of another round of civil war on the morrow of independence. Indeed, had unity been achieved then, the Derg's earlier successes in the Ogaden might not have been repeated in Eritrea. By 1978, reversal after reversal followed when the two fronts had to abandon, sometimes without a fight, the towns they had earlier occupied. The Eritrean masses themselves were the first to realize the consequences of disunity. As unity seems something impossible to achieve, 'Eritrean' nationalism entered its crisis period.

The full-blown crisis of this 'nationalism' followed the second round of civil war between the ELF and EPLF that broke out in 1981, when the EPLF, supported by its Tigrean ally, the TPLF, drove the ELF out of Eritrea. Thousands of fighters from the three fronts were killed, many wounded and many others, particularly from the ELF, went over to the Derg. The joint EPLF–TPLF forces occupied all the ELF strongholds. Contrary to the expectations of the EPLF, the Eritrean masses were extremely disheartened by the civil war. The crisis of 'Eritrean' nationalism was at its peak. Apathy reigned and then opposition to the EPLF in the newly occupied ELF strongholds developed.

Those ELF members who went over to the Derg were not only ordinary fighters. Commanders at platoon and company levels and, presumably, a few battalion commanders were also among them. Their driving motive was revenge against the EPLF, to help the Derg crush the EPLF. Extremely vindictive, they were prepared to go to any extent to fulfil their desire for revenge. Given the anti-EPLF attitude of the highland population of Eritrea (except the cities) this attitude was an additional blow to the fragile Eritrean 'nationalism'. At this point, the Derg prepared its 'Red Star' campaign. Unlike the previous campaigns, which were purely military offensives, the 'Red Star' campaign began

with well-orchestrated political offensives. A large meeting chaired by Mengutu himself was held in Asmara to define the objectives and content of the campaign, and to discuss ways and means to make it successful with the hope of ending the Eritrean problem once and for all. Though ending the conflict was wishful thinking, it was nevertheless high time for the Derg to make gains both political and military. Subsequently, it effectively dislodged the EPLF from the ELF strongholds and reoccupied them; it formed peasant associations, armed them and succeeded in using them as engaging forces against the EPLF, particularly in Seraie.⁷ With that, the crisis of 'Eritrean nationalism' went deep. Support for the movement was greatly reduced. The Eritrean masses became simply fed up, with the apparently never ending war, recruitment to the EPLF virtually stopped and, as time went by, the Derg consolidated its political successes in Eritrea. The EPLF could not take any military initiatives until 1985, when it tried to capture Tessenei and Barentu.

Prior to independence, 'Eritrean' nationalism was in crisis. Some people misread this situation by focusing on the military aspect of the conflict, as if the Eritrean people were entirely behind the EPLF. Apart from the display of general apathy and indifference to the forces involved in the conflict, one of the symptoms of this crisis is putting the entire blame for the disaster on the doorsteps of all the forces engaged in the conflict. This has led to questioning the roots of Eritrean nationalism and the assertion that there was and still is no reason why the brotherly peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia should not live together.

Conclusion

On 4 February 1993, Ethiopian police killed several and wounded more than 100 in a protest demonstration by Addis Ababa university students against the proposed visit by the UN general secretary Butros Ghali to Eritrea. The students were apparently against the referendum and eventual secession of Eritrea. Exactly 25 years ago (29 December 1969) troops of the Imperial Body Guard opened fire on a crowd of students killing and wounding several. The students were then in favour of self-determination for Eritrea. The comparison is telling indeed. The university students who took the mantle of the 'political vanguard' some three decades ago acted in a historical setting very different from that

7. The EPLF itself reported on its radio that skirmishes took place between its units and these 'anti-people' forces.

which prevails now both internally and internationally. In the absence of a political organization challenging the autocratic system, university students single-handedly confronted the old regime with democratic and at times radical demands, thereby taking the role upon themselves of shaping 'public opinion'. This was confirmed by the events of the February revolution that overthrew the imperial regime.

Present-day university students act in a historical situation which is new in every respect. They no longer play the role of shaping 'public opinion'. On the contrary, they themselves are appendages of various political organizations echoing the views of the many political undercurrents in the country. Their position on Eritrea can also be viewed in this light. Present-day university students are, politically and ideologically, products of the military regime that cut the umbilical cord between them and the radical student generation of the past. No wonder the legacies of Mengistu still linger. Nevertheless, the students' position on Eritrea reflects growing public disenchantment with the EPRDF's government and its position on Eritrea.

It might be useful to dwell on the background to the scheduled referendum in Eritrea. A referendum in Eritrea had been the EPLF's demand since it assumed dominance over the ELF at the beginning of the 1980s. The demand was again and again rejected by the military government. In 1989 the power balance in the battlefield radically tilted toward the EPLF following the spectacular and, as it turned out, fateful defeat of the Derg's army at Afabet. At about the same time, the TPLF routed the army in Shiraro and soon captured Tigray's capital, Mekelle. The Derg's demise was reinforced by the aborted military coup in May that year. With the failure of the coup the morale of the army sagged. Within two years the EPLF took control of Eritrea, while the EPRDF entered Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, one day after Asmara, Eritrea's capital, fell to the EPLF. Contrary to the expectations of many, the EPLF did not declare a republic and independent state. Instead, it formed a provisional administration and vowed to hold a referendum on Eritrea's future within two years. In explaining the rationale of the measure, Issayas Afewerki said, 'it has been a commitment, a political and moral commitment, for the population of this country not to make arms as a means of justifying an end. And since the cause has always been political and legal, the military victory in itself was not an end and would not justify the declaration of independence in this country.'

The main reason behind holding a referendum is the problem of international recognition. With the end of the cold war, the West, and

the USA in particular, is posing as the apostle of universal justice and democracy. The West wants to stay on the same track in its approach toward the referendum in Eritrea as it did in cases of recognizing the new states that emerged on the political map of Europe with the re-drawing of borders and the collapse of the state socialist paradigm there. This was mostly done through referendums. The West's approach is designed to avoid what Mesfin Araya recently referred to as the 'Eritrean syndrome'. Many sub-Saharan African countries are multi-ethnic and the possibilities for ethnic conflict to emerge are high. According to the West, in order to prevent an 'Eritrean syndrome' it has only to recognize the wishes/decisions of the people themselves through referendums and not the status quo made *fait accompli* by politicians insurgent or otherwise. As this has come down as a condition for recognition, Eritrean leaders had to accept it for they seem to have nothing to lose by holding a referendum.

One incontrovertible fact stands out starkly: the Eritrean people, through their long drawn-out and heroic struggle, have won. It is up to them to decide on the destiny of their country. If some Ethiopians think otherwise and hold that 'Eritrea is part of Ethiopia' and suggest that anyone other than the Eritrean people should decide the fate of Eritrea, they are entertaining a dangerous illusion. The university students who went out on a protest march against the Eritrean referendum and its likely secession, like some Ethiopian politicians and many commentators in the free press, are doing precisely that.

The views from Ethiopia on the Eritrean referendum are diverse. The dominant force within the political society, i.e. the government, the majority in the national council (the provisional parliament) and many political organizations are for the referendum and are prepared to accept its verdict. In this category there are also those individuals with longtime experience of political struggle both in Ethiopia and abroad. Those who oppose the referendum are in the main those sections of the population who have been brought up through and 'ideologically' cultivated by Mengistu's rule.

Falsification of Eritrea's history still deludes the mentality of many Ethiopians, a state of affairs that in turn affects the relationship between state and society. This could have been prevented by promoting public discussion and debate through conferences and seminars. In the absence of such measures it is difficult, if not impossible, to reach a common understanding of the Eritrean referendum and the problems in general.

Eventually, what is crucial is the solidarity between the two peoples.

The referendum may result in the secession of Eritrea. However, as no individual or group has ever had the power to control the course of history, the Eritrean people may in the future consider reunification with Ethiopia. One of the factors that can turn such an eventuality into a possibility is the development and strength of Ethio-Eritrean solidarity. For this purpose, understanding and support for the cause of the Eritrean people from their Ethiopian counterparts is essential. It is crucial to stress this and to emphasize the solidarity between the two peoples. On the other hand, views fomenting a call by the Ethiopian people for 'immediate and total repatriation of Eritreans' residing in Ethiopia by ill-fated politicians such as Goshu Wolde (see his interview in *The Ethiopian Review*, November 1992) are extremely dangerous.

Apparently those in favour of such an option tend to utilize the legacies of Mengistu. In a situation where no public discussion or debate took place on the Eritrean question for almost two years after the overthrow of Mengistu, it may not come as a surprise if Mengistu's propaganda about Eritrea's history and the movement is still widespread. The EPRDF seems to leave matters as they stand and to let spontaneity take its course. But it is difficult to attain stability in Ethiopia itself so long as the Ethiopian people have not yet understood the Eritrean question, its history and the development of the struggle there while respecting the wishes of its people. It is crucial to organize a series of public discussions and debate where the various perspectives and historical versions may be openly aired.

That said, let us raise one fundamental issue: the nature of the future Eritrean democracy. What kind of democracy will be introduced in Eritrea? If anything, it should express the diverse nature of the country. Then tolerance of the views of its diverse people and social/political forces in Eritrea is only natural. The EPLF has espoused a multi-party system with restrictions on religious and ethnic-based political organizations. These restrictions have already posed a problem in relation to the Afar nationality. It is impossible in multi-ethnic societies such as the countries of the Horn to exclude the ethnic factor from the general concept and practice of democracy.

For a stable and prosperous Eritrea the proper balance and relationship between state and society, marked by the introduction of democracy, is crucial. Reality dictates that both countries need each other. Above all, however, the democratic process in Ethiopia needs to be broadened, deepened and consolidated, while it has yet to be introduced in Eritrea.

5. An Important Root of the Ethiopian Revolution: The Student Movement

Randi Rønning Balsvik

The revolutionary change of government that took place in Ethiopia in 1974 was rooted in particular and longstanding stresses and strains. These had existed in Ethiopian society for some time, but were revealed to the world in the shape of a disastrous famine, and triggered off by the steep rise in the price of petrol brought about by the worldwide oil crisis. Enraged groups of demonstrators, mostly in Addis Ababa and Asmara, so challenged the government that the imperial autocratic power completely crumbled. The focus of this chapter is on the role of the students, who, even before 1974, had identified the ills of and 'contradictions' in Ethiopian society. Their verbal interpretations of the demonstrations and events in Ethiopia helped create a political culture, which in turn shaped people's reactions to the happenings of 1974 and to the changes that took place over the next few years. The nature of the reforms and the increasingly conspicuous Soviet presence in Ethiopia towards the end of the 1970s should not lead one to draw hasty conclusions about what forces were pushing the revolution: it had taken its definite course before the Soviet advisers came onto the Ethiopian stage.

The overthrow of Emperor Hayla-Sellase during 'the creeping coup' from February to September 1974 seemed to be one of the usual military *coups d'état* common to post-colonial Africa. Yet it occurred in a country that prided itself on having withstood European colonialism and which enjoyed great prestige in Africa and the world at large for its stable and legendary imperial regime. According to the 1955 constitution, the emperor was the 'Elect of God', a direct descendant from the biblical Solomon and Sheba, thus deriving legitimacy from divine

sources. Hayla-Sellase may be said to represent the last example of the traditional African divine kingship and Ethiopia one of the last theocracies in the world. He required very few political advisers. The Ethiopian parliament had no real power and no political parties were allowed to develop. The network of imperially chosen, highly privileged people who had kept up the administration of the government and the country was wiped out by the new low-ranking military rulers.

After having proclaimed '*Ethiopia tikdem*' (Ethiopia first) as its slogan, at the end of 1974 the military announced that it had adopted 'socialism', then, in 1976, 'scientific socialism' and 'Marxism-Leninism', as its guideline for revolutionary change in Ethiopia (Halliday and Molyneux 1981: 87; Ottaway and Ottaway 1978: 216). The new leaders attempted to create a sufficiently profound change in the established order of Ethiopia, within a short enough time span and accompanied by enough violence and bloodshed, to warrant the label 'revolution'. The new government declared a break with the past by eradicating the private ownership of land and then going on to redistribute it in both rural and urban areas. Its Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia of 20 April 1976 declared (Ottaway 1978: 214): 'No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism.' (For studies on Ethiopian society before, during and after the revolution, see Gilkes 1975; Markakis 1974 and 1987; Markakis and Nega 1978; Ottaway and Ottaway 1978; Halliday and Molyneux 1981; and Lefort 1983.) The military was greatly assisted and advised in its radical departure by civilians who had their roots in the student movement.

The Revolutionary Process

The events that unfolded between February and September 1974, which constituted the revolution, were unplanned and spontaneous. There was thus no leadership and no clandestine revolutionary organization ready and waiting to take over when the situation demanded it, as there had been in Russia in 1917. Workers participated and were radicalized during the action and demonstrations, but the Ethiopian Labour Union was weak because the country's industrial sector was itself underdeveloped (it was much smaller in size than Russia's had been in 1917). The peasants, most of them wretchedly poor and constituting some 90 per cent of the population, had no kind of organization, but in the south, where absentee landlordism was common, there were pockets of upris-

ings during the summer. The revolutionary process started with the taxi drivers' demonstrations. Then the Ethiopian Teachers' Association took to the streets and later went on strike in protest against low teacher salaries and the newly proposed and extensive educational reforms. Secondary school pupils supported the teachers' cause and created havoc by stoning the buses, which were owned by the emperor. The university students were there from the start, agitating and boycotting classes; their teachers also boarded the revolutionary train. One of the largest demonstrations, estimated at 100,000 participants, was of Muslims, supported mostly by students, demanding religious equality and the separation of church and state (Ottaway and Ottaway 1978: 4).

Before and during the civilian unrest, soldiers mutinied against and imprisoned their commanding officers in Neghelle, Debre Zeit and Asmara. The action was motivated by economic conditions and soon spread to most garrisons in the country. Civilian groups challenged the military to widen its protest from economic to political demands. Radical sections of the air force and army supported putting pressure on the government to bring about constitutional reforms and called for the freedom of the press and associations. A flood of demands required the government to dismiss people in high positions and to launch inquiries into how they had obtained their wealth.

Significance of the Students

The important point to stress here is that students were the only group whose behaviour conformed to an institutionalized pattern.¹ They were old-timers when it came to opposition and it was they who came closest to being 'revolutionaries' on the Ethiopian stage. They created a movement, which emerged during the 1960s as the most outspoken and visibly consolidated opposition to Hayla-Sellase's government. It has been rightly stated that the part played by the students in touching off the revolution has been exaggerated (Ottaway and Ottaway 1978: 25; Halliday and Molyneux 1981: 90). Scholars tend to undervalue or neglect the part played by students in preparing the revolutionary ground. But this does not apply to Ethiopia. As an editorial in the *Ethiopian Herald* (1 December 1989) remarked: 'University students . . . played a significant role in the making of recent history in our country. Their

1. This chapter is based on my research in Ethiopia (1970–73), which was presented as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Tromsø in 1979 and later published as a book (Balsvik 1985).

protest actions against the defunct feudal system and the active part they took in the revolutionary process are still fresh in our memories ... The sacrifices students paid ... are part and parcel of our national heritage.' Younger state employees in organizations such as schools, ministries and unions took their lead from the political culture created by university students. The role played by Ethiopian students was similar to that of students in China in the early part of this century and in imperial Russia from the second part of the eighteenth century until 1917. It should be emphasized, however, that unlike the Russians, Ethiopian students did not exhibit any propensity to assassinate people in government. Massive student protests have played an important part in causing governments to fall in many countries since the Second World War, including Korea, Japan, Greece and the Sudan (Feuer 1969). Although small handfuls of student leaders from the colonial territories initiated and led the independence movements in Africa, nowhere else in Africa were student movements playing as prominent a part as they were in Ethiopia in the early 1970s. Perhaps because emancipation from colonialism was so recent, serious protest against an African government by African students was relatively rare. Student opposition in South Africa did not really take off until the mid-1970s.

The educated few occupied a crucial position because of the extraordinarily high rate of illiteracy in Ethiopia (much higher than in Russia in 1917) and because of the absence of political parties, strong organizations and an indigenous class of traders and entrepreneurs. They constituted a disproportionately large section of what may be called the bearers of public opinion. To trace the roots of the Ethiopian revolution, it is therefore appropriate to enquire into the development of the social and political consciousness of the Ethiopian students and their interpretation of Ethiopian reality. What made them actually *see* poverty and injustice in their environment? What made them reject the fatalistic belief that man's living conditions were determined by powers beyond human control? What made them start questioning the legitimacy of political power? What made them believe that pressure on the government from below could bring about desired change? What made them move from a position of trusting Hayla-Sellase and the state of affairs in Ethiopia to one of rejecting his divine right to rule? And, finally, what turned them into enraged revolutionaries?

As is so often the case with historical explanations, the plant is produced from the fertile fusion of seed and soil, of external influences and general internal conditions, in this case the modes of government in the

state and at the university. Students were also radicalized by their own political practice and in the process of interplay between student demands and the kind of responses given by the Hayla-Sellase government.

Modern Education

Though differing widely in quality and range, a modern occidental system of education had been introduced into the former colonial African countries. Ethiopia had had no share in this development. The emperors had established a few modern schools in the early years of this century, but these tender plants had been uprooted during the five years of Italian rule when Ethiopians who had acquired some education were persecuted or even killed. The building up of a modern educational system only really started in earnest after the Second World War, but then the expansion of primary, secondary and university education was very rapid. Teachers and curricula were imported from various Western countries. An educational system adapted to the most developed parts of the world was implanted in one of the poorest and least developed countries in Africa. It was this opening up of the world through the acquisition of knowledge that made possible the politicization of Ethiopian students. The students became conscious of Western cultural and political values and could contrast them with the social and political reality in their own country. They began to see through the imperial Ministry of Information's attempts to manipulate broadcasting and newspapers, over which it retained a firm control. Rarely was poverty combined with such pride, pomp and pretensions as in imperial Ethiopia.

A residential university provided the students with ample opportunity for joint action and the exchange of opinions; and foreign teachers and textbooks bombarded them with new impressions. The first tottering steps towards establishing student newspapers and associations were taken in the late 1950s. There was strong censorship and control outside the university and the political norms of the society at large were reflected at the university through the regime exercising a strong hold over whatever took place there. Hayla-Sellase was the university's chancellor and the Board of Governors was composed of members of the government and imperial family. The first University College was administered by Canadian Jesuits (no arbitrary choice by the emperor), who were willing to censure and control the Ethiopian students' groping efforts towards expressing opinions about the society

in which they were destined by the emperor to play such an important role. The university set out to codify in every detail what the students were allowed to express and to do. They were not allowed to criticize the government or any religion, nor to write about any aspect of ethnicity. Despite this unfavourable climate, newspapers were launched and associations formed, but the numerous rules governing these activities were continuously revised, extended and, in the process, made more subtle and ambivalent.

Challenging the Authorities

The first social criticism was expressed through a traditional form of poetry, in which the message is conveyed by means of understatement and wordplay. On a particular day each year thousands of people, headed by the emperor and his court, would come to the university to watch sports and cultural events, of which sketches and theatrical plays formed a part. The recital and sale of the three winning poems in an annual student competition became the most popular event. Since it was impossible to censor the social criticism contained in these versified novelettes, and the students would not agree to censorship in advance, the government prohibited the presentation of sketches and plays altogether. But the recitals of poetry continued. The satisfaction of needling the power elite, however, came to an early end. Clearly insulted, the emperor and his court did not attend the celebrations from 1962 onwards.

In the early 1960s the students manifested a cautious challenge to the established authorities. The next stage saw them exhibit a wish to contribute to a change of society through an open exchange of opinions and through pressure on authorities in favour of a more active reformist course. This opposition was loyal to the system as far as the mass of students was concerned. Yet, even before the mid-1960s, it was obvious that there was a core of informal leaders who studied Marxism-Leninism and desired a revolutionary transformation of society. (They were referred to as 'the crocs', short for 'crocodiles'.)

The demand for co-participation was the most striking feature of the first large-scale student demonstration in Ethiopian history. In 1965 the students turned to Parliament during the course of a debate on the revision of laws regulating land ownership and tenancy, the most inflammatory political issue in the last years of Hayla-Sellase's rule. This appeal to Parliament was new and it signified that the Parliament (i.e. the people) and not the emperor was being recognized as the holder of

the country's sovereignty. In the Ethiopian context, the right thing to do was to submit a petition to the emperor, the only way, indeed, if one wanted to influence the government apparatus.

In 1965, there was a radical change in the students' attitude to the question of land tenure, in comparison with the previous year when the National Union of Ethiopian Students had supported the proposal for amendment now being debated in Parliament. This proposal comprised lower rents and increased security for tenants against being evicted by landlords. Even such a moderate reform, which did not alter existing property relations, had little chance of being accepted and carried out while Hayla-Sellase ruled. Massive pressure from foreign aid agencies did not help. Sweden threatened to cut off assistance within the agricultural sector if no reforms were carried out to prevent rich landowners from appropriating the whole profit. The students' stance in the 1965 demonstration to Parliament was a radically new one. Their slogan, 'Land to the Tiller', calling for the distribution of land to the cultivators, implied a massive transfer of resources from landlords to tenants. This became their unshakeable position with respect to land tenure policy and the most important issue surrounding any student action. It was also picked up as the central issue by senior classes in secondary schools when activism spread there towards the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s.

In 1966, under the slogan, 'Is Poverty a Crime?', students drew attention to and demonstrated against the imprisonment of beggars and invalids in camps surrounded by barbed wire. In 1967, they protested against a new law that in fact curbed their rights to organize demonstrations. They spread information about and discussed the contents of Ethiopia's constitution with respect to freedom of expression and association. Until 1967, the National Union of Ethiopian University Students held annual conferences at which resolutions were taken (in that year contained in a 44-page booklet), fully manifesting the students' desire to become a pressure group in national politics.

Confrontation

The year 1967 inaugurated new trends. The student movement passed from a phase in which it demanded participation in the political system playing the part of a loyal opposition, to a phase characterized by *confrontation* with the government. Gradually all *means* and *matters* were subordinated to the *single goal* of overthrowing the government. The student newspaper, *News and Views*, was replaced by *Struggle*, and the

activists managed to merge the various college unions into *one* organization, USUAA (University Students Union of Addis Ababa), with a view to creating one mouthpiece for all the students of Addis Ababa.

Action in 1968 concentrated on mounting a defence against foreign 'neo-colonial' influences in the country, particularly against US 'cultural imperialism'. With its massive military support to Ethiopia, the USA was seen to be keeping a reactionary regime in power and preventing necessary reforms. But beneath these objections there was a deeply felt resistance to the American war in Vietnam and to the presence of too many American experts in Ethiopia. At the peak of its operation the Kagnew base in Asmara employed 3000 Americans (Porter 1984: 207), of whom approximately 500 were military consultants and an equal number in the Peace Corps; the university was also largely dominated by US teachers and administrators. In the view of the students, this massive American presence prevented the government from developing its own domestic resources.

In 1969, the student movement imposed ten demands on the government, for which it had both campaigned in its demonstrations and disseminated among the population through pamphlets. Students focused on and gave a depressing account of the general state of popular education and the regime was severely criticized for mismanaging its resources. Students at high schools throughout the country supported the Addis Ababa university students' ten demands. Revolts began to develop, the university and high schools were closed and, for several months in the spring of 1969, schooling was in chaos. In the autumn, Marxist radicals won the election of USUAA. Both students and the regime began to prepare for confrontation.

The Question of Nationalities

In November *Struggle* published articles (in both English and Amharinja) on the nationality problem, which challenged the government's ethnic policy. They claimed that because the Amhara had colonized and suppressed all the other ethnic groups the unity of Ethiopia, which was so praised in government propaganda, was completely false. This was a very sensitive issue in the country and the students who wrote about it were no doubt inspired by Lenin's and Stalin's work on the question of nationalities in Russia. Ethiopia had many potential Katangas or Biafras. At this juncture, the government was involved in a great military campaign against Eritrea, whereas the students were questioning the unity of Ethiopia itself, for they envisaged a state that

was able to raise, liberate and equalize the various ethnic groups. At the same time, however, some student activists were prepared, as a short-term solution, to lend their support to the Eritrean and other uprisings in their struggle against the Hayla-Sellase regime. This group felt that the time was ripe to challenge the government to suppress the student movement by force. In turn, this would create such chaos that a provisional military regime would have to take over, thus opening the way for a new regime.

With the publication of these articles in *Struggle* in November, the Ethiopian press and radio left the public in no doubt that the cup was now filled to the brim and that the students had to be stopped. For once, student opinion could be quoted without any risk of arousing sympathy among listeners and readers. The leadership of USUAA, and particularly its chairman Tilahun Gizaw, now asserted that the movement had to be careful *not* to give the government the excuse it wanted to crush the movement completely. Demonstrations had to be discontinued. The students were unable to offer any alternative to the existing government – no *leader* of the opposition had come to the fore – and their contacts with other groups in society were too weak. Their strategy had to be to expand such contacts and to prepare alternatives to the existing regime.

Climax and Decline

Tilahun Gizaw was assassinated on the street in late December 1969. The following day, the emperor's Imperial Body Guard broke up a meeting of several thousand students and high-school pupils with the use of gunfire and bayonets, killing or wounding an indeterminate number. The university was again closed and the student movement entered its fourth stage prior to the revolution (1970–74). The characteristics of this stage were:

- The movement appeared to be broken. It did not succeed in distributing a *single* issue of its newspaper through university channels. The union was re-formed twice, but after a short while it was again banned.
- All those then running as candidates declared themselves to be Marxist-Leninists and partisans of Mao-Tse Tung.
- High-school students had become activists and were initiating their own protests.

Explanatory Factors

Social and Ethnic Background

What part did the social and ethnic background of the students play in predisposing them to political opposition? Since most of the sons and daughters of the power elite were sent to universities abroad, the great majority of students in Ethiopia had close links with the rural population, whose living standards were close to subsistence. They therefore had nothing to lose from radical social change. The 'bourgeoisie' was comprised mainly of foreigners. There were some Ethiopians engaged in trade and the professions, but on the whole they were made to feel that the system discouraged the growth of a strong national independent middle class. Their sons (less than 10 per cent of the students were women) brought with them this discontent with the regime. Students from privileged families did not, however, appear to be less oppositional on that ground. In fact the opposite was true; it gave them self assurance, an asset for a leading role. Tilahun Gizaw, for example, was the son of a wealthy landowner and the brother of one of Hayla-Sellase's daughters-in-law.

Oromo nationalism was not yet a significant factor in the country, nor at the university, where about 10 per cent of the students belonged to this large population group. Instead, Amharas and Tigreans, both elite ethnic groups, were very much over-represented there. This did not make them less disposed towards opposition. With the exception of Tigreans from the north, ethnicity did not appear to be a crucial factor with respect to political opposition. The Ethiopian government's military campaign against the liberation movement in Eritrea no doubt sharpened the opposition of the Tigreans, but it also increased that of other student activists.

Anti-Colonialism – The Scholarship Students

How, then, should the politicization and radicalization taking place among the students be explained? I have already stressed the importance of the introduction of modern Western education. But the student opposition can also be seen as part of the anti-colonial, nationalist emancipation process in Africa. Ethiopia had not only been closed in relation to Europe, but also in relation to the rest of Africa. To Africans under colonial rule and in the USA, independent Ethiopia represented the dignity of the race and Ethiopians themselves were assured of their superiority. Although Hayla-Sellase had shown little interest in the

yoke of colonialism borne by the continent, in the late 1950s he presented himself on the African scene to offer his services as a leader of a continent in need of the respect and prestige he enjoyed in the Western world. The contacts between the rest of Africa and Ethiopia suddenly increased. The Organization of African Unity and the Economic Commission for Africa both set up their headquarters in Addis Ababa. African leaders streamed into the city. In 1958, Hayla-Sellase handed out 200 scholarships to students from other African countries to study in Ethiopia. These students were disappointed to find a country that had escaped colonialism to be so backward, with a political structure no less authoritarian and paternalistic than the colonial administrations of their own home countries. They were surprised and could not help showing it. Their Ethiopian co-students had to fight their inbred feelings of superiority towards the Negroid race. They felt humiliated when they realized that the foreign students had had better schooling and knew far more than they did about the political development of the continent. It was thus largely through the contributions of foreign students that the Ethiopians were spurred into using both newspapers and associations. It should be emphasized, however, that the criticism of the foreign students was directed not against the Ethiopian government but against the university administration. In their eyes it paralleled the white dominance from which they were trying to emancipate themselves in their home countries. The attitude of the foreign students towards authority as such is what became one of the driving forces in the Ethiopian student environment.

The UNESCO conference on education in Africa, held in Addis Ababa in May 1961, was a rude awakening for the students and other intellectuals. Ethiopia was found to be one of the countries lagging most behind in terms of education. While in Africa as a whole about 40 per cent of school-age children went to school, it was estimated that only about 4 per cent did so in Ethiopia. There was only one other country in which fewer resources were earmarked for education.

External Influences

Some of the Ethiopian students' radicalism and intense involvement can be ascribed to influences outside the continent, to the flowering of political activism in the student environments of the 1960s. This activism was anti-imperialist, anti-American, anti-authoritarian and inspired by Marxist theory. It drew its fire from resistance to the US war in Vietnam and from the stagnant development in the Third World. These

external influences were transmitted through Ethiopian students studying in Europe and the United States. Their journals (for example, *Tateq* and *Challenge*) were brought into Ethiopia privately and put into circulation among students. Clearly, though, students abroad did not dictate actions to students at home. Though the journals were important for the student movement at home in providing ideological and theoretical expositions, as much of the inspiration for involvement came from activism inside Ethiopia as from those who studied abroad.

The mood of the student movement in Western countries and of the 'new left' in the United States was also imported into Ethiopia via the Peace Corps teachers. Large numbers of Peace Corps volunteers were highly critical of the materialism of US culture and of the war in Vietnam. They saw their mission as providing the 'sugar-coating' for the United States' global military policies and showed little restraint in communicating such views. Their position must have lent a certain amount of legitimacy to the Ethiopian students' vehement and aggressive criticism of the United States. The Peace Corps itself was violently attacked by Ethiopian students, who perceived it as yet another instrument in the attempt by the USA to dominate Ethiopia. (As a result, the Peace Corps teachers were withdrawn from Ethiopia in 1969.)

Ethiopian student activists drew their inspiration from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao and Che Guevara; from periodicals such as *New Left Review* and *Monthly Review*; and, notably, from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Through this book, which deals with deliverance from colonialism, Ethiopian students were able to compare the circumstances of the Ethiopian masses with those of people living under colonial masters. Even if the Ethiopian masters were indigenous, the people were still subjected to the cultural supremacy of the Amhara-Tigray ethnic group and to the political and economic supremacy of the Amharas and landowners. Fanon believed that a social revolution could not be brought about without the cleansing experience of violence to restore self-respect to the oppressed. The pattern of events in 1969 suggests that the students felt a strong affinity with Fanon's thought on the necessity to provoke violence in order to overthrow the political system. Worldwide student activism appeared to take firmer root in Ethiopia than in any other African country, though this still does not explain why the movement there became so active and so successful in mobilization. Insofar as explanations can be found, these lie hidden in the interplay between the challenges of the students and the responses of the Hayla-Sellase government.

Government Responses

The regime's attitude to students was full of contradictions. Education was seen as an almost magical formula for achieving development. In Ethiopia, as in other underdeveloped countries, expectations of the educated were so great that they tended to think of themselves as practically the saviours of their people and nation. Yet the regime in Ethiopia prohibited any free exchange of opinions about how the society could be changed and forbade the formation of political associations. The regime rejected all viewpoints from the very groups that were expected to develop the country.

In the early 1960s, when the movement was in its infancy, it was clear that expressing opinions and resisting the dictates of the Ministry of Information had their *price*. Student leaders, editors of student newspapers and student poets were expelled from the university just before taking their exams, some for ever, others for a year. From 1965 onwards, it was not just a question of expulsion but of imprisonment for those organizing demonstrations. To an increasing extent, brutal kicking and beating became an experience for larger and larger numbers of students. Year after year, increasingly violent confrontations took place between armed police or soldiers and unarmed students, who often lost control and hurled stones at their adversaries.

The regime's means of repression did more to gather the students behind the protests than any ideological or factual arguing could ever have done. To sustain the student movement, some had to be ready to accept the burden of leadership. If they were expelled, there had to be common student action, which on the whole meant the boycott of education. The protest was also extended through a demand that expelled or imprisoned students should be set free and allowed to continue their education. In turn, such action led to the university (later also high schools) being closed. University students were then deprived of their food and lodgings. Because approximately 90 per cent of the students were maintained by the university and more than half were absolutely dependent on this support, students were subjected to great strains as a result of their opposition. In the spring of 1969, action lasted for months and spread all over the country. In this troubled water the activists, with the help of illegal pamphlets, had ample opportunity to protest against the regime.

The students were united in their resistance to the regime. The only difference between the activists and the rest of the student mass was in the extent of their ideological schooling and the depth of their involve-

ment and exasperation. Government repression and the fact that students were not free to form associations became the best ally of the activists in mobilizing those more inclined to passivity, and the prerequisite for the quick development of student solidarity. Also, there is no doubt that activists were intense, almost religious in their persuasion and propaganda – and merciless in their demands on others to join. Those who did not entirely embrace the slogans of action and strikes and those who thought that somehow the system might be reformed from within, were branded as traitors. The determination of the activists stemmed from their conviction that they had found the ‘right’ recipe for developing Ethiopia. Marxism gave the students a tool with which to analyse the Ethiopian environment – to them it was a revelation. They professed their belief in ‘scientific socialism’, a road that would inevitably succeed. Contemporary Western democratic pragmatism seemed to offer insufficient ideological inspiration. The student leadership expressed no devotion to liberal democratic values. Their sense of urgency called for dictatorial methods.

Paternalism Wears Thin

Why did these crises recur year after year? And why did the regime not stick to its decision to expel the leaders and repress the associations? Student political activism was able to continue precisely because the regime’s response to it was inconsistent, fluctuating between repression, ambivalence and paternalism. Hayla-Sellase was the founder of a modern educational system in Ethiopia; he was proud of it and he regarded the students as his spiritual children. In the political system he was the source of pardon and mercy. In accordance with traditional Ethiopian ways of thinking, students were seen as children who had been misled. They ought to be severely punished, then pardoned and finally lifted up.

During the course of 1969 the emperor’s authority was thoroughly shaken and his paternalism wore thin. When Hayla-Sellase repeatedly experienced the rejection of his admonitions to the students to return to their classrooms, the government had to give in to the students’ demands. Such behaviour on the part of the youth was unheard of in Ethiopian culture – and most humiliating for the emperor. In the five years before the revolution, repressive measures against students who stuck out their necks became increasingly merciless. Both in 1971 and 1972 hundreds of students and high-school pupils were deported to prison camps on the outskirts of the country; they were exposed to a

considerable amount of systematic brutality and the leaders were tortured.

University Responses

The nature of the university as an institution and the way in which it handled student opposition played an important part in the development of the student movement. Subjected to constant pressures from two sides, the university both nurtured and rejected the students' demands. The regime insisted that in its relations with its students it should adjust to the political system of the country, whereas the students and many of the teachers felt it should fight for human rights and universal academic values, such as autonomy and academic freedom. As far as the students were concerned, the concept of academic freedom included not only teaching and what went on in the classroom, but also freedom of expression and assembly.

Foreign teaching staff (about half the personnel in 1970) had signed an undertaking not to intervene in the political life of the country. The Ethiopian staff was in a weak position because very few held permanent posts. Many teachers were sympathetic to the students' demands, yet they failed to do anything effective about the destructive relationship between the students and the regime; they did not even side with the students' call for freedom of expression and assembly to save the university as a meaningful educational institution. On a couple of occasions, the Committee of Student Affairs tried to analyse the causes of unrest on campus. These reports were intended to reach those in power with some words of wisdom. The message was a soothing lesson in youth psychology. Rebelliousness and bad behaviour were a normal stage of youth, not to be taken too seriously. Many of the European and American university teachers working in Ethiopia were themselves authoritarian and paternalistic, and few of them took student involvement seriously. Student rebellion tended to be looked upon as bad behaviour caused by immaturity and a lack of political understanding.

The students then basically lost respect for the university. After the events of 1969 it became common to withdraw from the university as an act of protest, which indeed it was in a country in which only a tiny proportion of young Ethiopians were privileged enough to enter such an institution. Their disdain and disappointment was above all directed against the detailed web of legislation that gradually came into being to counter the students' yearning for free expression and assembly. These rules represented the wish of the teachers to preserve some degree of

freedom of the press within the university. Self censorship became necessary to avoid state censorship. This was bound to lead to conflict, for university legislation could not stop the students and, one after the other, the appointed staff 'advisers' began to resign.

The university administration was no more disposed than the government towards listening to the students' grievances. In early 1973 it became known that Wallo province was suffering from famine. When the government showed no signs of admitting that thousands of people were in danger of perishing, teachers and students of the geography department organized a photographic exhibition on campus. About 500 students held an open-air meeting to discuss what could be done to draw people's attention to what was about to happen. The university president then called in the armed forces, who broke up the meeting with gunfire and swift punitive action against any student who did not run fast enough.

The government had failed to realize how difficult it was to limit the critical faculty developed by modern education to the strictly academic sphere; but then the university did not succeed in informing the authorities of this truth – in fact we may ask how seriously it ever tried. *The university thus failed to provide the context in which the students could teach each other the basic facts about a democratic political culture.* Student political associations were banned and there was no freedom of the press. In a situation in which the ultimate power at the university was vested in those who held the guns, only students who were ideologically conscious to the point of religious fervour and who were imbued with revolutionary courage and a revolutionary temperament were able to retain their positions as leaders and mobilizers of the masses.

Spreading the Culture of Opposition

The student culture of opposition was not confined to Addis Ababa. There was some evidence of it having spread to the agricultural college outside Harar and to the public health college at Gondar, but it was especially evident in the Ethiopian University Service. Students were required to spend the fourth of their five years at the university working, usually as secondary-school teachers in provincial towns; and this provided the student movement with opportunities to influence young people. Both the Russian and the Ethiopian student movements were imbued with a strong sense of historic mission to raise the position of the lowliest members of their societies. When the Russian students

nearly 100 years before had left the universities to go out and preach to the peasants, they had experienced rejection (Feuer 1969: 97). The Ethiopian students, however, on the initiative of themselves and their staff, formed the University Service through which they reached, not the poor peasants themselves, but their sons and daughters. The student union used this service to transfer political messages and to mobilize the pupils. It is therefore fair to state that university students were responsible for the high level of politicization that had taken place in Ethiopian society prior to the revolution. The many and lengthy crises at the university and in the schools involving the distribution of illegal pamphlets, and the sense of insecurity engendered by the withdrawal of subsidy and mass imprisonment of students, had brought increasing numbers of people, especially parents and other relatives of the students, into the culture of political opposition.

But what connection is there between the opposition culture created by the students and the military? The African tradition of *coups d'état* was not unknown in Ethiopia. In 1960 the Imperial Body Guard instigated a coup while Hayla-Sellase was on a state visit abroad. The instigators were the brothers Girmame and Mengistu Neway, the former being a recent graduate in political science from a university in the United States and the latter the commander of the Imperial Body Guard. They personally asked the students to organize a demonstration in favour of the coup, which they did, the first in the history of the student movement. The coup failed and Mengistu and Girmame were killed. Heroic dimensions were attached to their memory from which inspiration was drawn on the part of both the students and the military. It is also important to note that there were always some young professional officers studying at the university, who would thus be put in touch with the boiling pot of criticism and opposition against the very regime they had been brainwashed to obey blindly.

During the 'creeping coup' of 1974, the Hayla-Sellase regime gave one concession after another to the turmoil of opposition and rage, but these were always followed by more demands, especially from students who had no faith in the ability of the existing order to reform itself. The idea of establishing a constitutional monarchy in Ethiopia had insufficient appeal. The university was closed, as usual. Unavoidably Ethiopia moved towards a military takeover. Nobody else was prepared to step into the power vacuum. The political culture dominating the Ethiopian student movement gave direction and guidance to the new regime, partly because military non-commissioned officers had been converted

and partly because they recognized the importance of having students on their side. At the end of 1974, 60,000 university and high-school students were sent all over the country, to the remotest parts, to teach literacy and help set up peasant and women's associations. The aim was undoubtedly also to get rid of the formidable pressure group the students represented in the capital. The military used advisers with roots in student politics, but mostly from the movement abroad. This was not only because they were better schooled in the theory of 'scientific socialism', but because they were also sufficiently removed from Ethiopian events not to question the effects of such swift and sweeping reforms. The students had not, however, been fighting to establish a military dictatorship. To them that would be a betrayal of the revolution.

Two parties were established, both professing Marxism-Leninism, but one supporting the military regime and the other not. From an African perspective, the latter may be said to have held unrealistic expectations in believing that the military would overthrow the old regime to act as midwives for a 'democratic people's government' (Markakis and Nega 1978). The political culture rooted in the student movement had developed in less than two decades and under the most unfavourable circumstances. It continued for a few years to act as a disloyal opposition – now to the military rulers – and paid a dreadful price in the loss of lives. The opportunities to develop a political culture within the university had definitely been strangled. Even more than in Hayla-Sellase's time, the university was crawling with spies and informers, which created an atmosphere inimical to the exchange of ideas. The new regime had in no way taken over Hayla-Sellase's paternalism.

6. Reflections on Under-development: Problems and Prospects

*Eshetu Chole*¹

It is disheartening to note that Ethiopian agriculture is in a state of shambles. One has heard so much of the fertility of Ethiopia's soil, the excellence of her climate and the abundance, of her resources that one has been tempted to believe the now tired cliché that she can be the breadbasket of the Middle East. But a people does not live on potential alone, it demands realization. The sad fact is that, in the present situation, Ethiopia has a problem feeding herself, let alone exporting surpluses in magnitude to external markets.

(Assefa and Eshetu 1969: 111–12)

The unwary reader may take this quotation as a description of Ethiopia today, and would of course be justified. But – and here is the rub – these words were penned well before the great famines of recent history; in fact they were written over 20 years ago to describe Ethiopian realities of the time. I have chosen to start this paper with these lines because they suggest the existence of an underlying and persistent

1. Editorial Note: The following chapter was written and presented at a conference on 'Post-Revolution Ethiopia' in Oxford in August 1988. Though much has happened since then in Ethiopia, the editors are convinced that the reflections it expresses are just as valid today as they were five years ago. An attempt at updating the chapter would have demanded writing an entirely new paper, with the same theme and argument. Building on newer examples and experience would not have substantially altered the reflections, which, if anything, have become even more topical in the present situation, when a new chapter is opening up in Ethiopian development, one that offers a new chance to find a way out of the dilemma described.

tenacity in the country's development problems. What else can one deduce from the fact that realities separated by nearly a quarter century embracing a revolution and wars can be depicted in identical language?

In a chapter entitled 'reflections', a personal perspective is not entirely avoidable. In 1974, on the eve of the revolution, this is part of what I said in a lecture delivered at the Addis Ababa office of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) entitled 'Industry in Ethiopia: Structure and Problems':

In Ethiopia the agricultural sector has been performing extremely poorly, so much so that even the task of keeping the rate of increase in production in pace with the rate of increase in population has become a formidable one. As matters stand now, therefore, agriculture cannot provide the surplus that industrialization demands. And the responsibility for the poor showing of agriculture must be placed squarely within the agrarian framework, which includes land tenure systems, marketing and credit arrangements and government services. Without a drastic restructuring of the agrarian framework the requisite surplus cannot be generated, and the country's industry must inevitably remain the deformed and fragile structure it is. This suggests that it is futile to talk about problems of industrialization in isolation from the overall structure of the country's economy. Nothing less than a comprehensive re-vamping of the existing agrarian framework will do. To ignore this fundamental issue and to talk of industrialization in isolation would be to perpetrate an illusion.

The message is clear. By drastic restructuring of the agrarian framework I meant essentially, though not entirely, a thoroughgoing agrarian reform. And I was not a lone voice. Now compare the above passage with what I wrote in 1986 – more than a decade after the nationalization of land:

The situation is therefore not merely one of low national income ... but also of persistent decline, largely as a result of the alarmingly poor performance of the most dominant sector [agriculture]. ... [Further,] The problems [of Ethiopia's industrialization] are of a structural, policy and technical nature. As such they do not yield to pat solutions. What is required as a minimum is a recognition that the problems of the industrial sector cannot be solved in

isolation from the rest of the economy, particularly agriculture. It may sound paradoxical but the struggle for industrialization can be won only to the extent that the struggle for agricultural development is won.

(Eshetu 1986a: 151–65)

I believe there is an essential unity in the positions expressed in 1974 and 1986, which is that the problems of industrialization must be seen in conjunction with those of agriculture. This is because – it is argued in both cases – the poor state of agriculture is the primary bottleneck restricting industrial development.

But there is also a difference. While the 1974 statement is unequivocal in identifying the major constraint to agricultural development and in suggesting a way out, the 1986 statement is reticent on these matters. Of course, such reticence could be defended by resorting to arguments external to academic concerns. But at the very least one should ask why it is that agriculture still remains the Achilles' heel of the Ethiopian economy, even after one of the most radical agrarian reforms in history. Here again the safe thing to do would be to attribute the dismal performance of the agricultural sector to droughts and related natural phenomena, but we know there is more to it than that, because there exists uncontestable evidence that even in years of normal rainfall the country is not self-sufficient in food. Nor are the forecasts for the immediate future comforting.

The World Bank has shown that, barring a major shift of government policy, the country will not be able to reach food self-sufficiency by the year 2015. The series of *Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Studies* prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO ... have revealed that the scale of the ecological destruction in the country is such that the next two decades will witness famines of far greater magnitude than have occurred hitherto.

(Dessalegn 1987a: 48)

Given these realities, could it be that the faith placed on agrarian reform was illusory? (On the impact of the agrarian reform, see Dessalegn Rahmato 1984.) Or has the reform not been backed by the necessary complementary measures?

The answers to these questions are of fundamental importance. A second example pertains to the role of foreign capital flows, whether

these take the form of investment or aid. In this case let us reverse our perspective and argue from the present to the past. The country's very modest rate of growth of GNP in the post-1974 period is attributed in part to a very low level of domestic saving, a point that is well established. Yet the pre-revolution growth rate was not significantly better, although saving rates of over 10 per cent were commonly registered (see Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (n.d.: 82). Related to this, it is now common to lament the virtual disappearance of private foreign investment as imposing a serious bottleneck on the country's capacity for resource mobilization and to blame this on a policy framework that is hostile to private foreign investment. Pre-revolution Ethiopia, on the other hand, used to draw profuse praise for its favourable 'investment climate'. (See, for example, IBRD and IDA n.d.: 23.) In addition, the regime was universally considered stable and its friendliness with the West was a matter of record. And yet the inflow of foreign investment even then was nothing to be depicted in hyperbolic terms (see Duri 1969).

These two examples lead us to ask why it is that Ethiopia persists in its underdevelopment – with or without droughts, with or without land reform, with or without peace, with or without foreign investment. This chapter makes no claims to ready-made answers, but hopes to indicate possible areas of emphasis. To do this, it is best to begin with a brisk review of the state of the economy.

The State of the Economy²

According to the World Bank (1987d: 202), Ethiopia's per capita GNP of US \$110 in 1985 was the lowest in the world, and about 60 per cent of the total population is estimated to lie below the absolute poverty income level, defined as 'the level below which a minimal nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable.' ('1986 Social Indicators Sheet', World Bank 1987c: 2). Life expectancy at birth is estimated at about 47 years, compared with an average figure of 61 for all low-income economies (World Bank 1987c: 202).³ Infant mortality (168 per 1000) and child mortality rates (38 per 1000)⁴ are much higher than the corresponding figures for low-income

2. This section draws heavily on Eshetu Chole 1987b.

3. A recent official figure for Ethiopia is 50 years. (See Government of Ethiopia 1987: 53).

4. A recent official figure for Ethiopia is 133. (See Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 258).

countries as a whole. Population per physician (about 88,000), population per nursing person (5000) and daily calorie supply per capita (1681)⁵ all compare unfavourably with the average record for low-income countries.

While these figures indicate the massiveness of the tasks awaiting the country, the performance of the economy in recent years gives cause for worry. To begin with, the record with respect to GNP growth has not been satisfactory. Although this record is a mixed one, the overall trend is disquieting. As can be deduced from Table 6.1, the average rate of growth of GDP at constant (1980) factor cost for the period 1974/5–1985/6 was about 2 per cent. During the first four years after the revolution the average growth rate was a mere 0.4 per cent; it rose to a respectable 5.6 per cent during the next two years, only to fall to 3.1 per cent in the subsequent two years, actually registering a disastrous *decline* of 4.6 per cent during the years of famine. The unusually high figure of 11.3 per cent for 1985/6 should be read with caution because it appears impressive only in comparison with the catastrophic famine years. We are also told that the growth rate for 1987/8, which had been planned at 6.8 per cent, was actually – 2.1 per cent (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 9).

Even more telling is the fact that the rate of growth of GDP for this period failed to keep pace with that of population growth, resulting in a decline in per capita income. And this has had far-reaching implications for the economy, including a massive food deficit, shortages of basic industrial goods, a decline in domestic savings and investment, a shortage of foreign exchange, a rise in the price level and a worsening of the problem of unemployment.

The behaviour of GDP is largely determined by that of the agricultural sector, which – owing to its dominant role – sets the pace for the rest of the economy. For instance, the decline in GDP of 1983/4 was largely accounted for by the drastic fall in agricultural production during the period of most acute famine. Not only GDP but the other commodity-producing sectors also performed badly during this period.

5. A recent official figure for Ethiopia is 33,000. (See Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 260).

**Table 6.1: Percentage Growth Rates of GDP at
Constant Factor Cost (periodic averages)**

	1974/5– 1977/8	1978/9– 1979/80	1980/1– 1982/3	1983/4– 1984/5	1985/6
GNP	0.4	5.6	3.1	–4.6	11.3
Agriculture	0.4	3.6	2.0	–12.4	21.5
Industry	–1.9	12.1	3.9	1.0	4.0
Trade/Transport	–3.2	9.3	4.1	2.0	5.4
Other Services	0.4	5.6	3.1	3.8	3.5

Source: Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (ONCCP)

Among the consequences of poor agricultural performance are reduced raw material supplies for industry, reduced foreign exchange and therefore an impaired capacity to finance the purchase of imported inputs, poor prospects for internal resource mobilization and a narrow market (see Eshetu Chole 1987b).

Although industry has performed better than agriculture, it rests on fragile foundations, a fact which comes out clearly from a review of its salient characteristics. First, the structure of manufacturing output is dominated by non-durable consumer goods. Textiles, food and beverages account for more than 50 per cent of output (Government of Ethiopia 1986: 80–1), and their share in value added and employment is equally pronounced. Moreover, the structure of industrial output has not changed substantially in the last 25 years.

Second, the manufacturing sector is highly dependent on imported inputs, which means it has very weak linkages with the rest of the economy. In 1980/1, for example, almost 60 per cent of the raw materials used were imported (Eshetu Chole 1986b: 53). And for intermediate and capital goods import dependence is virtually total. Weak linkages mean the capacity of the industrial sector to contribute to a dynamic and flexible economic structure is limited. Also it makes the sector's performance highly dependent on the availability of foreign exchange.

Third, Ethiopian manufacturing rests on a low technical base. It is totally dependent on foreign sources for technology, with all that this implies in terms of foreign exchange requirements as well as the prospects for autonomous industrialization. Moreover, the machinery in most enterprises, which was mostly imported second-hand several years

ago, has become virtually obsolete, and this involves high costs for repair and maintenance (Gizachew Shiferaw 1986).

No less serious a problem is that the rate of industrial investment has been declining, one reason being that new private investment in this sector has been negligible (World Bank 1984: 17–19).

Operating within such constraints, the contribution of the manufacturing sector to output, employment and foreign exchange earning is therefore minor. The performance of the small-scale sector is even less satisfactory (see Ahmed and Hayyalu 1986). Although this sector uses a greater proportion of domestic raw materials and provides more employment, its rate of growth has been sluggish. There are a variety of reasons to explain this, not the least of which concerns uncertainties with regard to private investment.

Yet another area in which the unsatisfactory performance of GDP has negative consequences is that of resource mobilization. Information on domestic savings and investment in Ethiopia for recent years is summarized in Table 6.2.

The level of domestic savings is quite low. Over the period indicated in the table the share of savings in GDP comes to an average of about 3.6 per cent (2 per cent for 1987/8) (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 9), a figure extremely low not only in view of the country's investment needs but also in comparison with the pre-revolution record. It is also lower than that for other low-income countries. For example, the 1984 figures were 2 per cent for Ethiopia, 18 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa and 23 per cent for all low-income countries. At its worst, the saving rate was negative during 1983/4–1984/5. Also noteworthy is the fact that throughout this period the rate of saving has been declining continually.

Such a poor savings record has obvious consequences for the country's investment performance. Between 1975 and 1985 the share of investment in GDP averaged around 11 per cent, showing very little tendency to rise. Again this compares rather unfavourably with the record of other low-income countries, which in 1985 averaged 29 per cent. Due to a low saving rate and a decline in foreign exchange earnings, investment in 1987/8 was only 88 per cent of what was planned (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 9). With such a low investment performance the prospects for fast economic growth are limited.

As can be seen from Table 6.2, throughout the period savings have fallen short of investment, with the gap widening all the time. Thus, while domestic savings financed more than 60 per cent of investment in

the first period, this figure had plummeted to a negligible 2.5 per cent in the last period. Inevitably the gap has had to be financed by resort to foreign sources. In recent years the country has been almost totally dependent on foreign capital to finance its investment programme.

Table 6.2: Total Resources and their Utilization
(periodic averages as % of GDP)

	1975/6– 1977/8	1978/9– 1979/80	1980/1– 1982/3	1983/4– 1984/5
GDP at Market Prices	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Net Imports	3.6	4.8	8.3	11.7
Total Resources	103.6	104.8	108.3	111.7
Consumption of which:	94.3	95.7	96.8	100.5
Public	15.1	14.9	16.4	19.5
Private	79.2	80.8	80.4	81.0
Investment of which:	9.3	9.1	11.5	11.8
Public	5.4	6.4	9.0	9.4
Private	3.9	2.7	2.5	2.4
Domestic Savings	5.7	4.3	3.2	0.3

Source: World Bank 1987c: 23.

In principle, foreign capital flows can take the form of investment, loans or outright grants. With respect to the first category, no new private foreign investment has come to Ethiopia since the revolution. Nor has the role of public foreign investment been significant.

Information on medium- and long-term (MLT) loans is summarized in Table 6.3.

Between 1979 and 1985 annual disbursement of MLT loans averaged around Birr 500 million a year, but no consistent pattern is discernible. In 1984/5, the share of the various sources was: the World Bank Group (17.1 per cent); other multilaterals, i.e. the African Development Bank, the EEC Special Action Account, IFAD and the IMF (7.4 per cent); OECD countries (37.8 per cent); centrally-planned economies (21.2 per cent); and other bilaterals, i.e. Libya, China, Yugoslavia and others (6.5 per cent). Of the OECD countries, the most important sources were Italy, the United Kingdom and Canada. Of the centrally-planned economies, by far the most important source was the

Soviet Union. Loans from this group as a whole have shown the highest rates of growth.⁶

Table 6.3: Disbursements for Medium- and Long-Term Loans (in million Birr)

	'79/80	'80/1	'81/2	'82/3	'83/4	'84/5
World Bank Group	72.9	66.2	56.8	93.6	60.0	90.2
Other Multilaterals	149.7	114.9	150.7	32.6	44.2	39.1
OECD Countries	72.2	114.7	86.8	63.3	249.7	198.9
Centrally Planned Economies	30.7	70.6	64.8	158.3	130.4	164.3
Other Bilaterals	24.8	13.6	348.4	176.6	22.8	34.1
Total	350.3	380.1	707.6	524.4	507.2	326.6

Source: World Bank 1987c: 92.

Traditionally Ethiopia's external indebtedness has been low, but recent developments give cause for concern. At the end of 1985 total external debt outstanding and disbursed was slightly more than US \$2.9 billion (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 142). The deteriorating external debt situation can be seen from the behaviour of the debt service ratio (repayments of principal plus interest payments as a ratio of total export earnings). From a low of 5.8 per cent in 1979/80 this ratio has been rising steadily to reach 13.8 per cent in 1983/4, then rising dramatically to 21.5 per cent in 1984/5 and 27.3 per cent in 1985/6 (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 3). There are indications that the ratio has risen considerably since then. There is also evidence to suggest a worsening of borrowing conditions. Between 1976/7 and 1983/4 the average grace period for loans had gone down from 9.3 to 4.8 years, the average repayment period had declined from 45.2 to 22.6 years, and the average interest rate had gone up from 0.7 to 4.6 per cent (Government of Ethiopia 1978: 5).

Capital flows also take the form of grants. Grant assistance not related to famine, excluding that originating from the socialist countries, averaged about Birr 175 million annually between 1981/2 and

6. But the available information seems to be contradictory. An official source indicates that loans from socialist countries rose from Birr 277 million in 1974/5 to Birr 1875 billion in 1984/5. (See Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 15).

1983/4 (World Bank 1987c: 93. See Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 16). Most of this came from United Nations agencies and the European Economic Community. Of the bilateral sources, Sweden and Italy were the most important contributors.

Famine-related assistance was more substantial, but obviously it is concentrated in a given period. In 1984/5 it had reached US \$472.3 million, more than 61 per cent of which took the form of food aid (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 94).

The general picture is therefore one of a low level of investment, which, owing to an even lower level of domestic savings, has had to be financed more and more from foreign sources, with the consequences that external dependence has increased and the country's debt position has worsened.

These are matters that are reflected in the country's balance of payments, data on which are summarized in Table 6.4. (For a fuller treatment, see Eshetu 1988.) Due to the sluggish growth of exports, coupled with a relatively fast rise in both the volume and value of imports, recent years have been registering a steadily widening deficit with respect to merchandise trade, which has been only partially tempered by the more respectable performance of invisible trade. The current account deficit, which stood at Birr 873.1 million in 1984/5, was well over the figure for merchandise exports for the same year and it represented almost 9 per cent of GDP.

Most of this deficit has been financed by capital flows from abroad, mostly, as already shown, by public medium- and long-term capital. Part of the deficit has been financed by drawing on the country's international reserves. These reserves, which could finance the purchase of almost one year's imports in 1975, were not enough to cover even one month's imports in 1985. We are also told that the reserves at the end of the fiscal year 1987/8 were 68 per cent lower than those of 1986/7 (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 18).

A related problem is that of the state budget. Between 1979/80 and 1984/5, government revenue increased at an average annual rate of more than 9 per cent. During the same period, its share of GDP rose from 18.4 per cent to 23.4 per cent (World Bank 1987b: 25).

The growth in revenue has been paralleled by an increase in current expenditure. During the period indicated in Table 6.5, current expenditure increased at an average rate of 10 per cent, slightly higher than the corresponding figure for revenue. During the same period, its share in GDP increased from 18.3 per cent to 22.6 per cent. The major explana-

tory factor of this rise is the category 'general services', which in 1984/5 accounted for 55 per cent of total current expenditures. By far the most important item here is military spending.

Table 6.4: Balance of Payments (in million Birr)

	'79/80	'80/1	'81/2	'82/3	'83/4	'84/5
Export of goods and NFS	1209.3	1148.4	1076.4	1142.2	1266.6	1136.8
Import of goods and NFS	1749.3	1749.3	1959.2	1990.7	2309.8	2239.7
Resource balance	-540.0	-645.9	-882.8	-848.5	-1043.2	-1102.9
Factor services (net)	13.5	-14.6	-18.2	-28.1	-39.7	-68.4
Private transfers (net)	41.3	51.1	93.6	175.8	222.0	300.0
Current a/c balance	-485.3	-609.4	-807.4	-700.8	-860.9	-871.0
Official transfers (net)	124.0	123.9	139.9	191.4	335.2	617.6
Public loans (net)	310.6	334.5	640.2	421.4	373.2	330.3
Other capital (net)	-33.0	27.4	152.6	-60.0	64.9	18.9
changes in Reserves	83.6	123.6	-125.3	148.0	87.6	-95.8
Net foreign assets (in months of imports)	2.8	1.9	2.5	1.5	0.8	1.7
Debt service ratio	5.8	8.6	10.5	12.3	13.8	21.5
Current a/c deficit	5.7	6.8	8.8	7.0	8.6	8.8

Note: NFS = non-factor services; including errors and omissions, - = increase; payments of principal and interest as percentage of exports of goods and NFS.

Source: World Bank 1987c: 29.

Table 6.5: Central Government Finance (in million Birr)

	'79/80	1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5
Domestic revenue	1567.5	1756.9	1876.7	2058.1	2243.0	2317.9
of which:						
taxes	1302.5	1362.4	1436.4	1543.5	1718.6	1652.4
Current expenditure	1560.3	1655.3	1914.7	2290.6	2076.0	2236.2
of which:						
general services	917.3	951.6	1101.7	1327.0	1229.3	1229.4
Current surplus	7.2	101.6	-38.0	-232.5	167.0	81.7
Capital expenditure	387.7	435.9	538.8	1073.2	761.7	883.8
Overall deficit	-380.5	-334.3	-576.8	1305.7	-594.7	-802.1
Financed by: foreign loans/net/	142.3	128.0	474.9	450.7	215.3	356.6
Domestic borrowing/net/	238.2	206.3	101.9	855.0	379.4	445.6
Banking system/net/	(199.0)	(142.0)	(61.4)	(821.3)	(333.7)	(363.3)
Other	(39.2)	(64.3)	(40.5)	(33.7)	(454.7)	(82.3)

Source: World Bank 1987c: 25.

What Table 6.5 reveals is that domestic revenue barely covers current expenditures; in fact, there are years when it has failed to do so. The current account surplus is therefore negligible, if not outright negative. The import of this is that the budget generates no surplus out of which to finance development expenditure, which means resort has to be made to non-budgetary sources.

The rate of growth of capital expenditure has been substantial, averaging more than 23 per cent a year between 1979/80 and 1984/5. The budget has therefore been registering a consistent overall deficit, the

share of the deficit in GDP rising from 4.5 per cent in 1979/80 to 8.1 per cent in 1984/5 (World Bank 1987b). In 1987/8 for example, current revenue stood at Birr 2.8 billion while recurrent expenditure was Birr 3.2 billion. With capital expenditure of Birr 1.3 billion (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 14), this gives a total deficit of Birr 1.6 billion, or about 58 per cent of revenue.

The deficit has been financed by external and internal borrowing. In 1984/5, for example, out of the overall deficit of Birr 802.1 million, Birr 445.6 million, or about 56 per cent, was financed by domestic borrowing while the rest was covered by foreign loans. And almost 82 per cent of the domestic borrowing originated from the banking system, largely from the National Bank.

The consequence of increasing reliance on bank loans for deficit financing has been an expansion in money supply. The volume of money increased from Birr 3.04 in 1982/3 to Birr 3.85 billion in 1984/5 (National Bank of Ethiopia 1985: 10), representing an average annual rate of growth of 12.5 per cent. When this is viewed in conjunction with a 6.5 per cent decline in GDP in 1984/5 the inflationary nature of the increase in money supply is quite obvious. The single most important cause for the increase in money supply was the expansion in domestic credit, which increased by more than Birr 800 million between 1982/3 and 1984/5 (National Bank of Ethiopia 1985: 33).

According to the Ten-Year Perspective Plan (n.d.),⁷ the target rate of growth of GDP is 6.5 per cent, the rates for the sectors being 4.3 per cent for agriculture, 10.8 per cent for industry and 6.9 per cent for services. Per capita income is expected to grow at 3.5 per cent, but this is based on a faulty estimate of population. The plan envisages population to reach 46.1 million by 1994, a figure already reached by the end of the third year of the plan.

Of the anticipated growth in GDP, the share of agriculture, industry and services is expected to be 28.6 per cent, 32.9 per cent and 38.5 per cent, respectively. Accordingly, the structure of the economy is expected to undergo transformation, so that the respective shares of the three sectors in GDP are expected to be 39.1 per cent, 16 per cent and 23.9 per cent. Even then, however, the economy will remain basically agricultural.

The saving rate is expected to rise to 15.5 per cent, of which public savings would account for 43.2 per cent and the remaining 56.2 per

7. Information in this and the next five paragraphs is taken from this source.

cent would be made up by private enterprises, cooperatives and households. Consumption is expected to grow at 5.1 per cent, but its share in GDP is anticipated to fall from almost 97 per cent to 85 per cent.

The investment rate is planned to rise to 28.3 per cent, implying a gap between investment and savings of Birr 18.6 billion during the plan period. Of this shortfall, 44.5 per cent is expected to be financed from foreign sources, without doubt a high degree of dependence on external capital.

The share of planned investment by sector is: agriculture (22.5 per cent), industry (13.6 per cent), mining (5.3 per cent), energy (6.6 per cent), water resource development (11.2 per cent), transport and communications (13.4 per cent), and housing and urban development (9.5 per cent).

Ambitious as the targets of the TYPP are, even their complete fulfilment would still leave Ethiopia with enormous unmet needs. For example, per capita income would be Birr 397, which at the current official exchange rate, would come to less than US \$200. Other economic and social indicators would also show a serious state of underdevelopment. The challenges facing the country are therefore formidable.

They become even more formidable when viewed against the background of plan fulfilment in the first three years. The first year of the TYPP coincided with the catastrophic drought of 1984, which brought about a severe decline in agricultural output, which in turn had serious repercussions on the rest of the economy. The situation improved during the next two years, largely as a result of improved rains, but still there is no ground for complacency. For instance, although GDP grew by 8.1 per cent in 1986/7, it still had not reached its 1982/3 level (WPE 1987). And, as indicated earlier, it registered a negative growth rate in 1987/8. Therefore, the immediate prospects of the Ethiopian economy give ample cause for concern.

Problems and Prospects

If the immediate prospects do not justify complacency, what is the potential for development over the long term? The answer to this question is very largely determined by the nature of the country's problems, especially by whether they are of an enduring or a transient nature. The examples cited at the beginning of the paper (land tenure and foreign capital) help to demonstrate the precariousness of reducing the problems of development to single factors, however important these factors may be. But this is not to argue for a position of agnosticism. We do

need a general theory of development, including not only a diagnosis of the malady but also prescriptions for how to cure it.

To be sure, there is no shortage of literature on either count; on the contrary one encounters a veritable *embarras de richesses*. Yet the major schools of development theory leave much to be desired. The orthodox, neoclassical variant – which seems to be enjoying a resurgence after a generation of being on the defensive (see Hla Myint 1987) – is useful in identifying certain vital missing links (for example, capital and technology), but it explains as much as it obscures. Its flaws are most evident in its prescriptions. This school of thought, which finds its practical embodiment in the World Bank–IMF fraternity, is predicated on the supremacy of the free market and – its corollary – the inefficiency of state intervention. Yet, in societies characterized by ‘imperfect markets’ and a fragile private sector, how realistic is it to preach the virtues of *laissez-faire*? Moreover, how effective can a standard medicine kit (including devaluation of currency, minimizing the role of the state and ‘demand management’) be when applied to any and every country? How does one account for countries which have been performing poorly in spite of high investment rates? How can one explain the numerous cases of poor performance despite (or is it because of) substantial capital inflows? The World Bank and the IMF, for all the studied regularity and ready-made nature of their prescriptions, are hard put to produce any real ‘success stories’ – success defined not merely in terms of GNP growth but in terms of launching a country on the path of sustained development in the full sense of this much misused word.

Nor does the ‘radical’ prescription fare better. This school, which has several strands, attributes underdevelopment to structural causes and argues that it cannot be explained without reference to the history of colonialism. It views the state as a neocolonial entity tied to the world capitalist economy by a strong umbilical cord. According to this view, unless the neocolonial state is replaced by a revolutionary state, the chances for ‘disengaging’ from the world capitalist framework are blocked and whatever ‘development’ takes place remains dependent development. Yet, those states that are generally regarded as having pursued this approach – especially those in Africa – do not have enviable development records to boast of.

In the Ethiopian case, in fact, this approach encounters a serious problem. Ethiopia’s underdevelopment cannot be traced to a colonial past, because there was no such past. Paul Baran (1957), who was

without doubt the pioneering mind of this school of thought, contrasts Indian and Japanese history to demonstrate how British imperialism subverted autonomous development in the first place and how – in contrast – Japan could chart its own path of development, largely because it escaped being a colony. Why could not Ethiopia have followed the Japanese way, especially given the existence of an active handful of native intellectuals today referred to as Japanizers? And if its underdevelopment is to be explained by its own internal dynamics, what were the major factors that accounted for centuries of virtual stagnation? To the best of my knowledge, this question has not been satisfactorily answered yet. Nor would it be easy, following this approach, to explain – as opposed to rationalizing – the state of the economy in the post-1974 period.

The point is that the grand theories may throw light on certain crucial aspects of underdevelopment, but the illumination they provide is only partial. Meanwhile the state of underdevelopment of the vast majority of mankind persists and becomes even more entrenched. It is this yawning gap between theory and experience that on one occasion compelled me to give vent to the following frustrations:

The development record of the so-called Third World is a truly distressing one. The optimism of the late 1950s and early 1960s has yielded place to the pervasive pessimism of today. The gap between the haves and have-nots, instead of narrowing, has been widening, and, much more ominous, the task of feeding the world's hungry has become a formidable challenge in itself. The 'revolution of rising expectations', to use a phrase that had gained wide currency in the 1960s, has been smothered by the counter-revolution of despair and cynicism. . . .

And yet the amount of ink that has flowed in writings on development is of truly staggering proportions . . . it is with this paradox of voluminous theoretical work but meagre practical achievements that the teacher of development economics faces his students. . . . He presents elegant models of development, and yet, after several qualifications and modifications, he ends up by admitting that they have little or no correspondence with reality. He talks at length about the balanced growth/unbalanced growth controversy, only to conclude that the debate is largely sterile. He presents, in turn, arguments for giving priority to agriculture and those for giving priority to industry, but concludes that the ques-

tion, thus framed, is a false one, because what is required is an interdependent development of both. If asked what this means, he can only say that a proper answer must be based on a concrete examination of the realities of each particular country. And the list of knotty issues can be continued *ad nauseam*.

(Eshetu Chole 1985)

Admittedly there is an element of caricature in what has been expressed here, but unfortunately it is essentially correct. And it is in this contradiction between theory and reality that the major challenge of development economics lies.

It is against this background that we now turn to Ethiopian realities. Any prognosis of the country's development prospects must incorporate a number of important variables, which we will consider not necessarily in order of importance.

First, the natural resource base for development. In the words of a World Bank mission, 'Most external observers are at once captivated by Ethiopia – its people and its rich agricultural potential – and yet deeply puzzled by its problems: chronic food shortages and pervasive poverty' (World Bank 1987b: 1). With a total land area of more than 1.22 million square kilometres, Ethiopia is one of the largest countries in Africa. But it is difficult to make authoritative statements with regard to its resource base in the absence of a comprehensive and adequate survey of its natural resources. With respect to agriculture, where the country's greatest potential would seem to lie, what can be stated without any fear of contradiction is that the resource base is characterized by great diversity and complexity, embracing the entire range from the very poor to the very good. The traditional assumption has been that Ethiopia's variety of climatic conditions and soils as well as its numerous rivers, lakes and streams have endowed it with great potential for agricultural development. For a long time, in fact, there was a lot of talk about the country's potential for becoming 'the bread-basket of the Middle East'. Naturally such hyperbole has been tempered by the recent famines.

Still, the resource base for agricultural development is encouraging. The country's topographic and climatic diversity can be turned into an advantage. Of the total land surface, only 14.8 per cent is currently unutilizable and 51 per cent is grazing or browsing land (UNDP/FAO 1984: 5), and the prospects for developing irrigation agriculture are believed to be bright. Its livestock population is the largest in Africa and

the tenth largest in the world (Ten-Year Perspective Plan n.d.: 30) and there is considerable unexploited potential. Equally considerable but even less exploited are fishery resources (World Bank 1987b: 13). Again in the words of the World Bank, 'The overall potential for growth is considered good, and generally better than [that of] many African countries' (World Bank 1987b: 13).

This favourable assessment must, however, be qualified by a recognition of the serious environmental constraints within which the economy operates. Land, the country's most important means of production, has been undergoing a process of degradation – 'the processes of soil degradation through water erosion and loss of vegetative cover leading to reduced productivity of the land in densely settled or exploitatively used regions' (Daniel 1988: 6) of the country. In addition, the north-eastern and eastern regions, mainly inhabited by nomadic populations, are subject to desertification. As one student of the problem put it:

In the recent past accelerated population growth without change in the traditional land use practices, coupled with the recurrent drought in many parts of the highlands, have led to serious land degradation, low productivity and the accompanying human misery. More and more ecologically fragile environments, especially steep slopes and marginal lands such as water-logged plateaux and basins were brought under cultivation; and vast areas of forest and woodland were cleared. Traditionally, in most parts of the highlands, no soil protection measures were practised. As forests and woodlands were cleared for cultivation, wood became a scarce resource, particularly in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia. Animal manure came to be used as fuel instead of as an organic fertilizer and soils became more impoverished.

(Daniel 1988)

One very important implication of this fact, given the country's demographic characteristics, 'is that there is not much arable land to go around relative to the size and growth of the population' (Daniel 1988: 26). This in turn portends 'food shortages, hunger and famine'. One must hasten to add that these phenomena are only partially attributable to environmental degradation and that, consequently, conservation measures – however necessary – are not a panacea. But a worsening ecological framework, on top of a rapidly growing population and a backward technology, dictates a sober view of the country's agricul-

tural prospects. As such, it represents a crucial variable in the country's development equation.

With respect to mineral resources, there is a widely held impression that Ethiopia's mineral deposits are substantial. Among the resources believed to exist in the country are oil, natural gas, gold, platinum, copper, nickel, thermal power, iron, tin, coal and potash (Ten-Year Perspective Plan n.d.: 27). None of these is exploited to any meaningful extent, and it is unclear what the prospects for large-scale economic exploitation are. But petroleum exploration is under way and, according to official sources, there are encouraging prospects for the exploitation of natural gas and thermal energy. It has also been estimated that the country has the capacity to generate 56 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually out of water power alone; present generating capacity, however, is only 1.2 billion kilowatt hours (Ten-Year Perspective Plan n.d.).

In general, therefore, one can state that Ethiopia's natural resource base, while favourable relative to that of many other African countries, should not be exaggerated, as has often been the case in the past. In particular, the spectre of drought must be constantly reckoned with.

The other important variable is population. Until the 1984 census (Government of Ethiopia 1984: 15), there was a widespread view that Ethiopia was not subject to serious demographic pressures. But the census revealed not only that previous estimates of the population were gross underestimates but also that the growth rate is a fairly high one. Any long-term development strategy must therefore reckon with the population question.

Based on the 1984 census, Ethiopia's population would currently be upwards of 46 million people, of which about 88 per cent is rural. At the estimated annual rate of growth of 2.9 per cent, the population would double in about 24 years, a sobering prospect to contemplate. One estimate shows that it would reach 210 million before it stabilizes, assuming, that is, that life support systems do not collapse earlier (Brown and Jacobson 1986: 9-10).

If the working-age population is defined to include those in the 15-64 age-group, the labour force would represent slightly more than 50 per cent of the population. It is especially noteworthy that 47 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age, suggesting not only a high dependency ratio but also significant implications for the provision of education and other services as well as for the hidden population momentum. A related problem is that of urban unemployment, which in

1983/4 was estimated at half a million, or about a quarter of the urban labour force (Ten-Year Perspective Plan n.d.: 27).⁸

Although considerable advances have been made in expanding adult literacy, the illiteracy rate is still 30 per cent (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 50). Also the capacity of the educational system for training high- and middle-level manpower is quite limited, so that skill shortages are pervasive in practically every field. Therefore, demographic and related factors are destined to exert considerable constraints on the development effort.

Another important variable, which is essentially political in character, is the war situation prevailing especially in the northern parts of the country, and, without a resolution of this, it is impossible to foresee bright prospects for the economy. In a very real sense, the Ethiopian economy is a war economy, and the implications of this fact are quite far reaching.

The most obvious impact of the war is on the country's capacity for surplus mobilization. With military spending claiming upwards of 50 per cent of the recurrent budget, its adverse impact on the fulfilment of economic and social needs is all too obvious. Nor is this the entire story. The war, being highly import-intensive, involves a serious drain of foreign exchange, thereby worsening the country's debt-servicing problems and compromising its prospects for long-term development.

Note must also be taken of the physical destruction wrought by war, including the damage done to roads, bridges, communications networks, schools, hospitals and other elements of infrastructure. Add to this the displacement of large numbers of people and the climate of uncertainty and hopelessness it inevitably creates, not to speak of the staggering loss of lives that it brings about. A war of such magnitude is an enormous burden for the fragile Ethiopian economy to bear, and as long as the state of war continues any talk about development will remain illusory. For this reason, therefore, the prospects for development in Ethiopia are very intimately related to the prospects for peace. And it would be foolhardy to speculate on what the future holds in this regard.

Another aspect of the political dimension is what, for want of a better term, we shall call the 'investment climate'. For all the rhetoric

8. The number of unemployed jobseekers registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as of 1987/8 rose from 541,000 to 598,000 (see Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 55).

about a socialist economy and centralized planning, the private sector accounts for something like two-thirds of total output.

Although the role of the state in the economy has been greatly enhanced, it is by no means all-embracing or uniform in all sectors. In agriculture, for example, the contribution of state farms to output is no more than 2 per cent (information obtained from ONCCP). The role of cooperatives is also modest. As of June 1988, there were 3358 legally recognized agricultural cooperatives with 266,900 members, i.e. no more than 5 per cent of the country's farmers. Thus, this is a sector highly dominated by private production, a fact which sets important limits on the possibilities of planning.

In contrast, the state plays a more active role in the industrial sector. But even here there are important variations. While the contribution of the public sector is very high in electricity and water (100 per cent) and medium/large-scale manufacturing enterprises (89.2 per cent), it is less so in construction (48.4 per cent), and nil in small-scale industries, thus making its share in industry as a whole 58.3 per cent. As of 1986, there were only 842 cooperatives in the handicrafts and small-scale industries sub-sector, with a total membership of about 39,000 members (Government of Ethiopia 1987b: 28).

In the service sector, the state's contribution is 100 per cent in administration and defence as well as in banking and insurance, very high in education (94.3 per cent), health (87.6 per cent) and transport and communication (71.8 per cent), while it is fairly low in housing (36.4 per cent) and wholesale and retail trade (19.3 per cent). In sum, as of 1984, the state's contribution to total output was no more than one-third.

However, the role of the state in economic decision-making is quite pronounced and its impact on the character and performance of the economy is overwhelming. As a corollary, there has been a concerted attempt to belittle the role of private enterprise, and a series of measures have – wittingly or unwittingly – culminated in creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear for private capital. Not surprisingly, such an atmosphere has had an adverse impact on the economy.

In the first place, private-sector saving has been declining, and since this has not been made good by a corresponding rise in public saving, the aggregate saving rate of the economy has inevitably plummeted. Either lacking confidence to engage in productive activity or effectively barred from it by state policies, mercantile capital concentrates on making fortunes out of the pervasive scarcity that characterizes the

economy and on indulging in conspicuous consumption. As can be seen from Table 6.2, the share of private investment had declined from about 42 per cent between 1975/6 and 1977/8 to 20 per cent between 1983/4 and 1984/5. For related reasons, there has not been any instance of private foreign investment over the last decade or more, public foreign investment has been negligible, and credits from commercial sources have dried up. In addition, Ethiopia's share of official development assistance is among the lowest in the world in per capita terms.

All this should not be misconstrued as naive faith in private investment or in foreign capital. The point simply is that, given her investment needs and the very poor effort at domestic resource mobilization (especially the mobilization and utilization of government saving), Ethiopia cannot afford to close her doors to domestic private investment or to capital flows from abroad. It is for this reason that the 'investment climate' enters as an important aspect of the development problematic.

Quite apart from the aggregate level of investment (which is very low) and the relative roles of its private and public components, much also depends on its sectoral and sub-sectoral distribution as well as on its efficiency.

While agriculture legitimately receives a larger share of investment than any other sector, expert opinion is almost unanimous that it deserves even more. And within agriculture, there is widespread agreement that the peasant sector's share of investment, given its dominance, is considerably low relative to that of state farms. The latter, which account for less than 3 per cent of agricultural output, gobble up more than 40 per cent of the government and financial sector resources allocated to this sector (World Bank 1987b: 38). What is more, they have little to show for it, given that, by and large, they have emerged as losing propositions for a number of years now. This is not meant to glorify peasant agriculture, which is itself highly inefficient; the point is that this sub-sector's inefficiency is to a large extent *due to* low technology while in the case of state farms it is *in spite of* concerted government backing through technology. Although state industrial enterprises have been performing better than state farms, the situation does not justify complacency. Profitability in these enterprises is fast declining, completing the general picture of investment inefficiency. The prospects for development are thus also dependent on the prospects not only for raising the level of investment but also for enhancing its efficiency.

Both of these tasks are at least partially related to the country's capacity for generating and/or saving foreign exchange. As stated earlier, the balance-of-payments picture is a sobering one and it is difficult to foresee a dramatic improvement in the immediate future. An export structure that is uneasily dependent on coffee, declining agricultural production (and therefore exports) and a rising import bill lie at the source of the problem. Also a precarious foreign exchange position has detrimental consequences on investment, which is highly foreign-exchange intensive.

All the variables that we have identified ultimately tie up with the performance of the agricultural sector, and this is unfortunately a sector that operates within a variety of environmental, technological and policy constraints. The situation is aggravated by a rapidly rising population and a war that seriously retards the process of capital accumulation. In these circumstances, even cautious optimism may turn out to be wishful thinking.

7. Economic Policies under Review

*Stefan Brüne*¹

After years of low economic growth, preoccupation with natural disaster, crippling costs for internal security and protracted regional wars,² Ethiopia remains one of the poorest and 'least developed countries' in the world. From a political and economic perspective, the 1980s were a lost decade for Ethiopia, as they were indeed for other sub-Saharan African countries. Conscious of the shortcomings of its economic performance, facing a dramatically changing international environment, and confronted with new uprisings in the north, the government has been reviewing its economic policy.

In his speech of 5 March 1990, President Mengistu announced major changes in macro-economic policy, conceding that the public, private and cooperative sectors all have roles to play in Ethiopia's economic development. Subsequently, government and party presented plans for economic liberalization, particularly in agriculture, which envisaged a mixed economy (which *de facto* it has been anyway) incorporating a combination of planned and market elements. However, at this stage, it is difficult to say how far the reforms will go, because some of the measures are still at the planning stage and others are believed to be the

1. Editorial Note: This chapter was formulated in 1991, only weeks before the fall of the Mengistu regime. It basically looks at the experience of the Mengistu period in the light of the liberalization of 1990/1. It asks what a 'mixed economy' could offer in terms of alternative economic and social solutions, and which 'mix' of economic elements of planning and free market, state ownership and privatization could promise positive results for the future. The question is as valid today as it was then. It may well be asked with renewed interest now that a new government has embarked on the road to economic restructuring.
2. According to some estimates some 60 per cent of the government's budget was devoted to defence (*African Economic Digest* 1990).

subject of dispute between 'hard-liner' and 'reformist' factions. However, with regard to the agricultural sector, the government seems now convinced that individual peasant farming is bound to persist for many years, and that there is significant scope for increasing productivity while using traditional technologies (World Bank 1990: 84). A first step towards the liberalization of agriculture was taken in January 1988, when, after eight years in which official procurement prices had remained unaltered, the producer prices paid by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) for cereals and other field crops were raised by an average of 7.7 per cent. Additionally, the AMC reduced the crop quotas which peasant associations (PAs) were required to supply, and reverted to relying more heavily on private traders to deliver them.³

In accordance with the new economic policies, peasants are to gain legal ownership of the crops, plants and trees on the land they farm, with usufructuary rights on agricultural land becoming hereditary. Grain market restrictions and quota deliveries have been abolished, and the AMC reduced to the role of a state marketing board competing within an open market. Cooperatives were given the right to disband, while further state support for those which chose not to was also promised. While much of the detail of the new policies has yet to be disclosed, all redistribution of rural land has been stopped and no more quotas are being collected. Many cooperatives have disbanded or are in the process of doing so. Peasant associations appear considerably weakened and reluctant to act, knowing full well that any major change in the rural social order is bound to affect their own power and status. Meanwhile state control has crumbled in many of the rural areas, the only exception being army recruiting campaigns, campaigns which are being carried out using increasingly repressive methods. Peasant associations are forced to provide their quota of recruits. In some cases, executives of those peasant associations which failed to provide the quota were conscripted themselves. Such methods inevitably antagonize peasants and their leaders alike, serving only to spread discontent and turn the peasants against the state and its representatives.

Nevertheless, individual peasants are tentatively beginning to assume their new rights, and to test the strength of their new status. The net result is an unmistakable decline in the authority of local

3. Private trade in cereals was restored in Arssi and Gojjam, and those parts of Shoa where it had earlier been prohibited. Restrictions on interregional movements by traders were also lifted.

administration, and a general feeling of insecurity and unrest, in the expectation of further changes to come. Everybody seems to be trying to consolidate their positions, in the face of an imminent period of struggle over the new rural order.

Production Structure, Growth Development and Food Security

Like most of its sub-Saharan neighbours, Ethiopia is a pre-industrial, agrarian-based society. Almost 90 per cent of the population live in rural areas, and agriculture is still very much the dominant sector of the economy. Its share of the GDP is around 40 per cent and accounts for 85 per cent of total employment.

For the most part, the country's agriculture is dominated by small-holders who produce largely for their own use: Ethiopia remains a country of subsistence agriculture. With the average farm size being 1–2 hectares, according to some estimates 80 per cent (!) of rural produce does not appear on the market (Dessalegn 1984: 67). Nevertheless, agriculture generates some 90 per cent of export revenue. Taxes on coffee – which is the main export and accounts for some 60–80 per cent of foreign exchange earnings – are the largest single source of government revenue.

Around 28 million people, i.e. almost 60 per cent of Ethiopia's population, are believed to be living below the absolute poverty line. Classified by the UN as an LLDC, Ethiopia shows all the characteristics of an economy whose development is largely dependent on foreign exchange and technology (Dessalegn 1984: 67). Its economic progress is hampered by basic constraints such as a weak infrastructure,⁴ low agricultural productivity, heavy dependence on one export commodity, a small industrial base and a shortage of skilled manpower.

Given the generally low level of development and its overriding importance for the economy, Ethiopian agriculture is faced with genuinely complex problems. It has major hurdles to overcome, notably through its physical constraints, current trends in population growth, ecological degradation and limited means of capital accumulation. In view of the agricultural sector's multi-faceted role within the national economy, Ethiopia's planners have to reconcile manifold and partly conflicting aims and interests.

4. This applies particularly to the road system. Nearly three-quarters of Ethiopia's farms are at least half-a-day's walk from all-weather roads. The lack of roads has been a major hindrance to extension, input supply, output marketing and change in agricultural technology.

Seen from a development perspective, Ethiopia's agricultural sector has to fulfil at least four main functions. It must:

- feed a steadily growing rural and urban population;
- finance its own growth and structural change;
- provide capital and raw materials for the country's long-term industrial development, and
- provide cash crops for export.

At present, the Ethiopian agricultural sector is not even able to fulfil its most basic and important function: the provision of food for a large and fast-expanding population. Consequently the country's supply problems have become a major international concern, especially since the 1984 drought, which forced the government to make repeated appeals to the international community for emergency and food aid. Although domestic production of food crops has risen since then, it is still no higher than in previous peak production years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the period 1983/4–1987/8 the country's food security depended on imports, which amounted to 16 per cent of the net cereal availability and averaged one million tons per annum, of which 85 per cent was food aid.⁵ Per capita food production in the 1980s is believed to have declined from 82 per cent of the nutritional norms to only 75 per cent (World Bank 1990: 7). While Ethiopia's population was growing by some 1.35 million per annum,⁶ an estimated food deficit of 942,000 tonnes of grain had to be bridged with food aid and imports in 1990/1.

Prospects for a quick recovery are bleak. Ethiopia's dependence on food aid and commercial grain imports can be expected to continue for years, regardless of climatic conditions.⁷ Thus the government's forecasts, which predict agricultural production of 10.6 million tons in 1995 (*International Herald Tribune*, 12 January 1991), and on which the

5. Curiously enough figures for cereal imports from donor sources are much higher than those in official Ethiopian statistics. According to FAO and WFP data food imports were almost twice as high (93 per cent in the 1983/4–1987/8 period) as indicated in Ethiopian customs data (World Bank 1990: 120).
6. The annual average growth rate for 1973–87 being 2.7 per cent (IMF 1990: vi).
7. Ironically, as Lofchie and others have emphasized, heavy investment in state farms tends to increase the dependency on foreign capital rather than decrease it (Lofchie and Commings 1982: 7–25).

EEC–Ethiopian Lomé IV negotiations were based, seem somewhat unrealistic. Current trends in population growth, land resource utilization and environmental degradation point to serious problems in the future and, most probably, a sharp increase in famine vulnerability over the next 10 to 30 years. By the year 2000 Ethiopia might have to sustain a population of 100 million (Bureau 1988: 23), while current soil loss rates, which are highest in cultivated land, amount to 1.5 million tons a year. Hurni (1988) estimates the current soil loss and the resulting water loss – taken together with biological degradation and land degeneration – effectively mean an annual 2–3 per cent reduction in soil and productivity.

The following are the main reasons for the disappointing performance of Ethiopian agriculture. First, there has been little change in the area of land under cultivation, the area with major crops (cereals, oil-seeds, pulses) having remained at around six million hectares since the early 1980s. Secondly, the yields have remained virtually static. And thirdly, there have been low returns on investment in state farms and cooperatives, where the level of investment has been highest in the past. Self-sufficiency by the year 2000 would require an annual increase in agricultural productivity that few countries in the developing world have attained. This has led the World Bank to conclude that ‘a policy of food security rather than food self-sufficiency would be a more efficient objective (World Bank 1988: 124).

Has Socialism Failed?

In Ethiopia, as in other sub-Saharan African countries, the high hopes which had been associated with socialist development ideas in the 1960s and 1970s have lost much of their original appeal. One reason for this has, of course, been a rapidly changing international environment. The end of the cold war, and the declining ability and fading political will of the Soviet government to give political and economic support to its allies in the developing world, gives African governments less room for manoeuvre, the option of exploiting the East–West conflict as a means of securing political, economic and (perhaps above all) military support having vanished.

But apart from this, there are equally important economic reasons which point to the need for new policies and a ‘new realism’ (Kühne 1990: 1). There is a growing consensus in Africa and elsewhere that orthodox socialism as perceived by Marxist–Leninist scholars and politicians has failed to produce a model that is superior to capitalism in

terms of economic productivity. Thus the apparent failure of socialist policies in Africa has given rise to lively debate on the development policies both in Africa and elsewhere. Grigory Polyakov, a Soviet scholar with experience in Ethiopia, looks back (in Pausewang et al. (eds) 1990: 79–88): ‘In trying to apportion blame we make much of “imperialist intrigues” . . . As far as economics is concerned, the blame is primarily ours.’ And Anatoli Adamishin, until recently Soviet deputy foreign minister responsible for Africa, goes even further: ‘I do not see convincing evidence for the fact that the confrontation between socialism and capitalism is still the decisive factor for the development in our world’ (Adamishin 1989).⁸ And the experiences of most African countries opting for socialist development have been aptly summarized by the German scholar Dieter Senghaas, who writes:

While socialist societies have usually successfully carried out the social and economic reforms necessary for development, their momentum has often been stifled by the ubiquitous inability to dismantle those very autocratic and authoritarian modes of government that the reforms normally resulted in. This is particularly true of the failure to decentralize control of the economy and to increase the scope for political participation.

(Senghaas 1988: 140)

It is one of the ironies of history that many of those socialist regimes (inside and outside Africa) that embraced the most revolutionary and progressive ideology, over the years turned into rigid and even extremely conservative regimes. In this context, it is surprising to note the extent to which old-fashioned ‘petty bourgeois nationalistic thinking’ has been preserved.

This analysis should not, however, suggest that serious economic difficulties and failings are confined to countries of socialist orientation. They are in fact a general phenomenon. As recent experiences in Kenya, Zaire and the Ivory Coast have demonstrated, development along capitalist lines is not always impressive or effective, the outstanding exception being Botswana (for a good analysis see Bayart 1989: 139–53). At the same time, the People’s Republic of the Congo is

8. A more conventional view is taken by Gromyko (1989), director of the African Institute in Moscow: ‘New political thinking does not imply renunciations of the class approach, but it develops this approach in a new historical situation.’

one of the few African states with steady, if moderate, economic growth rates. It appears that, regardless of the ideological orientation of their respective governments, African peasants have chosen the exit option by remaining in, or even withdrawing into, the subsistence economy. Food production in Africa showed a minimal increase of only 1.5 per cent in the 1960s, in real terms a decrease in relation to a population growth of 3.0 per cent. The situation has been exacerbated by military conflicts and climatic disasters, thus rendering poverty and famines endemic in several parts of Africa. The most recent World Bank forecast identifies sub-Saharan Africa as the area world wide facing the most serious problems, in sharp contrast to the other developing regions. While the World Bank sees in South Asia reasonable prospects for reducing poverty, and Latin America can hope for moderate development, the African countries south of the Sahara will have to prepare themselves for a 'drastic increase in poverty'.

We can quote the most recent *World Development Report*:

The sharp rise in poverty projected for sub-Saharan Africa distinguishes it starkly from other regions. The 3.7 per cent annual growth in GDP that underlies the projections is somewhat higher than the average growth achieved over the previous 20 years, but it will be barely adequate to hold living standards steady over the next ten years. In that time, the population will grow by another 165 million, and an additional 70 million people will be living in poverty. . . . To see the scale of the task confronting sub-Saharan Africa, consider what it would take to prevent the number of poor from increasing. Even with a supportive policy environment that includes greater provision of social services and some improvement in income distribution, a growth rate of about 5.5 per cent a year – nearly 2 per cent higher than the projected rate – would be needed to raise the per capita consumption by enough to meet this target. To achieve this, the region would need much more, and better designed, foreign assistance. Such assistance will be effected (and warranted) only if domestic policy is consistent with the reduction of poverty and the development of indigenous capacity.

(World Bank 1990: 170)

In this light, the ideological controversy between capitalist- and socialist-oriented development appears much less important than believed by many; and the fact that almost all economically prosperous states have

a market-oriented economy does not mean that the revival of market and private initiatives is the remedy for all problems, as neo-liberal 'free-marketeers' maintain. Many, if not the majority, of market economies are also failures. The error of one-sided and narrow Marxist thinking should not be replaced by erroneous one-sided thinking about market forces. In the words of the German economist Meinhard Niegel (*Die Zeit*, 4 May 1990: 41): 'The market economy is not a plant which prospers always and everywhere. It is rather, particularly its social variant (social market economy), a cultural plant which needs . . . thorough nursing.' And Zaiki Laidi (1988: 66), the Paris-based Africanist, is probably right in saying that 'the rapid conversion of Africa into a neo-liberal model remains just as much an illusion as its sovietization was ten years ago' (my translation).

It doesn't matter whether we refer to it as class struggle or social stratification (to name two possibilities), the problem of exploitation and social antagonism in market economies remains. The extremely uneven distribution of income and wealth are a strong case in point, the widening gap between rich and poor on the north-south axis – which is in danger of becoming irreversible – being a further dimension of the problem. Consequently, many countries harbour serious misgivings about the pure market economy, in the sense of *laissez-faire* capitalism. Of the many reasons for this, a major one is that the trickle-down and spread effects of growth measures have often failed to meet expectations, or have not taken effect at a politically acceptable pace. Therefore, as Weinrich Kühne writes, 'the socio-political debate on the limits and risks of the market forces, and private initiative on how to organize state and society in a human way, on how to control the exploitative aspects of the market economy, and how to guarantee more participation at the workplace etc. has to continue, whatever its label will be' (Kühne 1990: 23).⁹

The general disarray prevailing in the developmental debate is also mirrored in the plethora of terminology used. Some people refer to 'structural adjustment with a human face', others – borrowing from the Federal Republic of Germany – prefer 'social market economy'. Still others suggest 'socialist market economy' or 'market economy with a socialist orientation'. One of Gorbachev's economic advisors, V. I. Basanetz, stated that the Soviet Union is currently promoting 'socialism

9. As one author put it: 'Getting the prices right is not the end of development; but getting them wrong often is.'

with a human face and elements of the market economy.' It is not clear, however, how this differs from 'capitalist economic order with a human face.' All these concepts and terms originate of course from the industrialized countries, and exactly what their significance is for the majority of African countries where 60–80 per cent of the population is agrarian, remains to be seen.

Paul Henze has come forward with a significant proposal for a joint peace initiative by the USSR, United States, Canada, the major countries of Western Europe and Japan. Under the heading 'Opening the Way to Peace and National Reconciliation in Ethiopia' he has listed certain proposals, among them – point 6 – 'Free Trade', which he defines (Henze 1990: 34) as: 'Commitment of all parties to open movement of goods of all kinds within and among all parts of the country. Freedom of all citizens to trade without hindrance.' It seems quite clear now to many that the market is indispensable, i.e. that the negation of the market had a detrimental impact, particularly on Africa's agricultural development. Marxist theory mostly perceived the market and private initiative from a perspective of exploitation, tending to overlook another important aspect. This is that it provides information, through the level of prices, about the efficient allocation of resources, and in providing a key to local conditions, indicates what response is required. But the most important question remains unanswered. How can market-oriented concepts be introduced in countries which have no or underdeveloped capital markets, and in which privatization would simply create private instead of public monopolies?

Mixed Economy – A Way Out?

While the simple capitalism versus socialism dichotomy is increasingly challenged as too ideological and too simplistic, mixed economy has become the new catchword and the centrepiece of the new economic thinking.

In South Africa, the ANC and other liberation forces, including the South African Communist Party, have based their economic programmes on this, as did leading social and political forces in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, the People's Republic of Benin and the People's Republic of the Congo.

But although 'mixed economy' has taken the debate by storm, it has to be admitted that it owes much of its allure to its ambiguity. The term may be flexible enough to appeal to a wide range of political groupings, but the crucial question remains: exactly what mixture of state and

private elements is best for specific economies and their individual sectors?

No doubt the centralist and bureaucratic methods of government, which have all too often proved inimical to freedom and humanity, have to be dismantled. But at the same time, the state needs, as all successful market economies (in Europe and Asia too) demonstrate, to provide both an efficient and predictable legal and administrative framework, and a material infrastructure if the market is to prosper. Given the overwhelmingly rural character of most African countries, the debate should therefore concentrate on the *transformation of the state (and its bureaucracy), and not just its withdrawal*. Just leaving the peasants to their own devices after a long phase of harassing them, would be a grave error. Africa therefore, as well probably as Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself, needs a fuller and more exhaustive debate on this. Relatively successful economic experiences in East Asia, (although partially derived from exploiting the cold war), point to the fact that the state needs to promote and encourage exports, while at the same time actively protecting local markets. Market and planning are not two sides of a dichotomy, as often presented. All attempts at the economic and democratic transformation of the state, however, can only succeed if the antagonism between ethnicity and the modern territorial state is resolved. 'Growth with equity' must not necessarily remain an illusion, given properly functioning local markets, decentralization and intelligent state intervention. This includes firm support and economic freedom for peasants, who – like other social strata – should not only be given freedom of expression but also institutionalized guarantees for participation in the central state decision-making process. This is no easy reform task for an urban elite, which tends to believe its formal qualifications empower it to decide what has to be done for backward and illiterate peasants. In the past, African governments tried to promote agrarian development either through nationalized farms, collectivization and nationally operated collectives (in countries with a socialist orientation) or through agro-business jointly managed by state and multinational companies (in countries with a capitalist orientation). The continent's economies did not prosper under these two models. Nationalized farms turned into unproductive capital mongers while agro-business did not take much heed of the needs of the indigenous population.

8. Designing a Structural Adjustment Programme: Reconstruction, Rehabilitation And Long-Term Transformation¹

Fantu Cheru

The Ethiopian economy is firmly based on agriculture, and has been held back by a number of factors since the 1974 revolution. While the civil war and successive droughts are partly to blame, the introduction of centralized planning, the nationalization of land, the over-emphasis on state farms to the detriment of small farmers, the implementation of forced villagization and resettlement programmes, and the excessive taxation of peasants have all contributed to a decade of economic stagnation. The basic characteristics of the economy are low agricultural productivity, a small industrial base, shortages of skilled manpower and

1. Editorial Note: In early 1992 Fantu Cheru was asked to present a paper on environmental challenges to economic development to a symposium on Ethiopia's requirements of a structural adjustment programme (SAP). While working on the paper he became constrained by the narrowness of the topic. He wished to broaden its scope to accommodate his concern to promote economic and environmental improvements in living conditions, especially of poor people in rural areas, urban slums, in the streets of Addis Ababa and in the various camps for demobilized and unemployed ex-soldiers. Building on the OAU's African Alternative Framework for a Structural Adjustment Programme (ECA 1989), he eventually developed a comprehensive alternative to the World Bank's adjustment package for Ethiopia. His programme (which is presented in this chapter) starts from the needs of the people, with the rehabilitation of their existing but disrupted productive capacities; it aims to bring about a long-term transformation of the economy for the benefit of the majority of the rural and urban poor.

a weak infrastructure (for an excellent treatment of the problem, see Pausewang et al. 1990). Given the severity of the economic crisis, both the transitional government and donor communities widely acknowledge the need for a fundamental restructuring of the productive sectors of the economy with the active participation of broad sectors of the population. The real challenge, however, is how to design an economic programme that would protect the poor and vulnerable groups in the stabilization phase without sacrificing long-term development.

The impetus for market-based reform began in December 1987 when the Mengistu regime reluctantly introduced its 'Agricultural Marketing and Pricing Policy Reform' to stimulate food production (by releasing the report of the Government of Ethiopia 1987). This partial retreat from socialism was influenced by two important factors. First, in October 1985, a team of Soviet economic advisers working at the ONCCP submitted an economic plan to the government, which called for more radical market-oriented policies with regard to the pricing, marketing and distribution of goods and services. The Sokolov report² placed greater emphasis on agricultural production, commercial farms and private sector initiatives than on state control of the economy. It warned that during the transition period any attempt by the government to prohibit or block private (non-public) exchange was 'stupid and suicidal'. Despite the widespread deterioration of the economy, the Mengistu regime chose to ignore the warning, being more preoccupied with war than development.

The second reason for the government's partial retreat from socialism in 1987 was to do with the drought of 1986, which came at a time when it was mounting its extravagant twelfth anniversary celebration of the revolution. This was a major embarrassment. In addition, events in Eastern Europe were moving in a different direction. Gorbachev's much-publicized economic liberalization had caught on in Eastern Europe like a bush fire. For Mengistu and his party it was time to make a strategic move and embrace perestroika in the hope of unfreezing much-needed financial assistance from the World Bank and other donors.

2. The report was written by a group of Soviet advisers (GOSPLAN) to the ONCCP, but not released by the government. A summary was circulated in NGO circles, while few diplomats had access to the original report by Sokolov et al. (1985) until Paul Henze (1989) published it in a RAND publication.

In its December 1987 policy statement, the government for the first time acknowledged that, under existing conditions, increased output from the peasant sector could not be realized without improved infrastructure, soil conservation, and the provision of better seeds, fertilizers and farm implements. The need to reorganize the marketing, pricing and distribution systems was also acknowledged.

But despite the implementation of these reforms, the donor communities' response was limited (though food aid increased). To appease the donors and secure additional funding from them, a new investment code was promulgated in June 1989, and further economic liberalization in March 1990. Among the measures announced on 6 March 1990 were:

- unlimited private investment in all sectors of the economy;
- use of government land for private construction of industries, hotels and other enterprises;
- private development of houses, apartments and office buildings for rent or sale;³
- abolition of the fixed price and quota system; the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) was allowed to compete with private traders in the open market;
- inheritable legal usufructuary rights on the land the peasants till, and the right to sell their produce privately, including trees on individual land, but not sale of the land.⁴

Following this announcement, peasants seized the opportunity to take over unused government land, including some state farms, disbanded producer cooperatives and fired government-appointed peasant association leaders. The rapid disintegration of rural institutions and political instability throughout the country severely hampered implementation of the above-mentioned reform measures.

When the Mengistu regime collapsed in May 1991, it left behind not only an empty treasury, but a whole plethora of social and economic

3. This was followed up by a government proclamation (see Government of Ethiopia 1990).
4. Report by President Mengistu Haile Mariam to the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia and resolutions adopted by the plenum, Addis Ababa, March 1990.

problems, which required radical policy measures beyond political intervention. Among the horrible legacies of the past government are:

<i>Productive Sector</i>	<i>Social Sector</i>
agricultural crisis	education crisis
breakdown of rural institutions	health crisis
breakdown of infrastructure	refugees/displaced persons
environmental crisis	youth unemployment
energy/fuelwood crisis	special problem of women
administrative malaise	

The reconstruction task in Ethiopia can be compared to that of Western Europe after the Second World War. The priority then was not to liberalize markets, since productive capacity was destroyed, but to attain plausible capacity through rehabilitation and reconstruction. There are of course differences between the two situations. Unlike the European case, the destruction of Ethiopia is of our own making. Second, while Europe's rapid reconstruction was aided by a massive inflow of external funds under the Marshall Plan, Ethiopia cannot expect to generate a substantial volume of aid given the sense of urgency and competition expressed by newly liberated countries as a result of the ending of the cold war. Therefore, while adjustment policies in pricing, exchange rates, public sector reforms and liberalizing markets are some of the essential ingredients of a balanced national strategy, Ethiopia's special circumstances call for an adjustment package that is consistent with the country's short-term reconstruction and long-term development needs. Since agriculture is the mainstay of the Ethiopian economy, there must be a fundamental reorientation of government and donor policies and resources towards solving rural problems. The important prerequisites for poor farmers to succeed are land reform, credit, improved extension, greater government accountability and people's participation.

Structural Adjustment or Transformation?

The Ethiopian situation must be analysed in the context of the larger debate on Africa's future. Since Ethiopia will become the last country in Africa to join the bandwagon of structural adjustment and policy reform, it has the added advantage of reviewing the experiences of other African countries to have adopted SAP reforms and of integrating

successful strategies into its own programme, while excluding those that failed or had negative consequences.

The debate about Africa's future, which began with the publication of the World Bank's *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (commonly referred as the Berg Report) a decade ago, still continues, although the World Bank and the Government of Ethiopia are much closer now in their prescriptions than they were before (World Bank 1981). A comparison of two recently released official documents (World Bank 1989b and ECA 1989) highlights where the debate is going. A review of this debate is highly relevant and might help us to think through our formulations on Ethiopia's transitional development plan. The World Bank is humbler now and no longer claims to know all the answers. The Africans are also far more open to criticism and to taking responsibility for their own mistakes. This does not, however, mean that the World Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) are reaching a consensus on the proper development strategy for Africa. This has been a healthy debate and the points raised by both sides are increasingly being reflected in the design of the so-called 'new generation' of structural adjustment packages (reviewed in Fantu and Bayli 1991).

The theme underlying the African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment (AAF) is that orthodox adjustment policies are inappropriate for Africa because they fail to attack the structural causes of balance-of-payment difficulties, production bottlenecks and low rates of revenue generation. Policy reforms designed to restore short-term financial and price structures simply exacerbate the economic problem by undermining any chances of transforming African economies or of laying the foundations for long-term sustainable development with equity. The ECA views human development and transformation as a *sine qua non* for self-sustained development. And the only way to do that is to give greater emphasis to the alleviation of poverty and the provision of education and social services. This puts the ECA report on a collision course with the apologists of structural adjustment.

The World Bank also makes a major departure from its landmark 1981 Berg Report. Whereas the latter basically ignored African inputs, the World Bank's (1989b) project on *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (henceforth SSA) relied heavily on them in preparing its report. There are, however, still major differences between the two agencies. The World Bank views poverty alleviation as a separate activity from structural adjustment and they also differ over the

appropriateness of devaluation, liberalization and privatization policies. The ECA is not opposed to these measures but wants to apply them case by case. Moreover, the ECA justifiably challenges the World Bank's continued insistence on export-led growth in the face of declining commodity prices.

Essence of Conventional SAP

Essence of Transformation Strategy

budgetary balance
ending subsidies
currency devaluation
levying user fees
public sector reform
cut in social expenditure
liberalization of markets
limited role for the state

promoting self-reliance
human development
support to informal sector
expansion of infrastructure
some protection is necessary
expand social expenditure
selective liberalization
local democracy/decentralization

Despite the differences mentioned above, the SSA resembles the AAF when it comes to prescriptions. The SSA calls for the same types of transformation the AAF highlights – human-centred development; agriculture forming the primary foundation for growth; involvement of people in national planning; government accountability; enhanced intra-African trade; and accelerated regional integration and coordination.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP 1991) *Human Development Report* adds a necessary and important dimension to the discussion by reminding us of the need to adjust economic development to human needs and not vice versa. Its main thrust is to protect the needs of the poor and to put basic human needs in first place on the road to development. Thus, for UNDP, the main purpose of development is to inspire, mobilize and engage the initiatives and resources of the poor for productive efforts. This approach demands their democratic participation in decisions concerning their lives and their future. Consequently, the report underlines that participation means empowering the poor.

Although the UNDP approach has yet to be transformed into a readily applicable economic reform programme, its basic message is extremely important. The likely consequences for the poor of any adjustment measure has now to be given serious consideration.

The basic message of this chapter is that an SAP for Ethiopia should be designed to combine the World Bank's market-based efficiency model, the ECA's long-term strategy of adjustment with transformation, and the UNDP's human development approach, while at the same time taking the short and long-term needs of the Ethiopian people into account. While market-based solutions are very important and necessary in the Ethiopian situation, markets have to be created before they can be liberalized. For example, a small-scale Ethiopian soap producer who, as a result of the government's misguided foreign-exchange restrictions over the past 17 years, had invested very little to upgrade his production capacity, cannot be expected to compete on the free market without upgrading his technology. But to improve his production capacity he has to have government protection and support. Only then can he take advantage of liberalization. Given the general disintegration of the infrastructure and institutions necessary to revive the productive sectors of the economy, rehabilitation and reconstruction must proceed ahead of indiscriminate market liberalization. Careful management of market liberalization is particularly important when it comes to considering exchange-rate policy and the liberalization of imports. Once capacities have been built and production resumes, then the market can be completely freed.

Adjustment with Transformation

A programme for the fundamental economic restructuring of Ethiopia must give priority to the transformation of peasant agriculture. It can do this both by using far more of the national resources to support this sector and by shifting the balance of power away from the central administration and towards community control of decision making. Security of land tenure guaranteed by law and a strong policy on extension and remunerative pricing will stimulate agricultural production. This is the best social protection poor peasants could have against poverty and inequality. While adjustment policies with respect to pricing, exchange rates, public sector reform and the liberalization of markets are essential for a balanced national strategy, Ethiopia's particular circumstances require a more dynamic and comprehensive response geared towards reconstruction and rehabilitation on the one hand and transformation on the other.

Reconstruction and Rehabilitation

The new economic programme must be based on realistic identification

and better utilization of local resources and capabilities. The government should not pin its hopes on a substantial inflow of foreign aid and direct foreign investment (DFI) to get out of the current crisis. For the transitional period, the first priority can no longer be expansion, but must be to consolidate whatever minimal progress has been achieved over the last two decades. The programme should aim to employ local people so that they are cushioned from the ill effects of higher food prices and increased fees for health and schooling. Required actions should include:

- regaining plausible capacity utilization levels for basic productive sectors (agriculture, industry, transport) and for basic services (health, education, water). For example, reconstruction and expansion of the transport system is essential if peasant production is to improve. Almost 80 per cent of the Ethiopian population still live at least half a day's walk from the nearest road;
- increasing food self-sufficiency on farms and at the local level by guaranteeing peasants secure rights to their crops and land; prompt payment for crops; free access to local exchanges of products without quota deliveries or other state interferences; access to health services, schools, extension advice and local planning procedures;
- increasing national food self-sufficiency by providing farmers with the necessary incentives, which include inputs, social services, consumer goods and prompt payment for their products;
- reconstruction and rehabilitation of the infrastructure (schools, hospitals, roads, bridges and communication networks) destroyed by the war or through years of neglect;
- continuing relief for refugees and displaced persons until they are able to return to their homes and begin producing enough for themselves. A record number of 7.3 million people are currently on the brink of starvation. This figure includes 1.2 million refugees from Sudan and Somalia who have been forced to flee to the camps in Ethiopia. An estimated 200,000 Ethiopian refugees have returned to Ethiopia to escape from the fighting and disintegration there;
- increasing financial and managerial discipline. This includes institutional reform through restructuring, decentralizing and reducing the civil service and by making civil servants more accountable. Priority should be given to strengthening the coordinating activities of the various ministries and government agencies responsible for formulating, implementing and evaluating policies. Civil service

accountability should include the right of local people to question and/or appeal against decisions, as well as a directive to the administration to support rather than disrupt local development efforts.

- reversing the massive brain drain. Over the past 20 years Ethiopia has lost thousands of its educated young men and women to the developed world. To ensure sustained development it is essential that this situation is reversed. What incentives can be adopted? How much would it cost and who would pay for it? Although the UNDP has a limited programme designed to encourage nationals to return home, the transitional government, with assistance from donors, must actively seek ways to reverse the trend. The success of the economic recovery programme depends, among other factors, on the acquisition and retention of mid- and high-level manpower at sectoral ministries and regional administrations.

Macro-Economic Issues

Policy measures designed to support rehabilitation and reconstruction could become ineffective without radically revising the government's macro-economic policies on the budget, pricing, liberalizing trade, extending the private sector and reforming the public sector. This is necessary to correct structural distortions in the economy, to increase efficiency and to improve the allocation of resources to the productive sectors. Among the measures to be adopted are:

Devaluation of the birr: Given the general deterioration of the productive sector, an immediate devaluation of the currency would have no effect on the export potential of the economy. However, phased devaluations are unavoidable once the rehabilitation phase is over and capacities have been upgraded. Moreover, since Ethiopia's export base is still very narrow, potential exporters would be unable to take advantage of an immediate devaluation. In fact, a devaluation of the currency would undermine the rehabilitation phase by increasing the cost of inputs and spare parts before any production has started.

Price support, special import exemptions, access to credit and storage, and restrictions on the money supply can, however, help stimulate production in sectors still engaged in exports (for example, coffee). But it would be dangerous to devalue the currency simply to increase the output of one or two export crops; such a move would hold the rest of the economy to ransom and undermine attempts to achieve long-term development. Further, devaluation would be unlikely to improve

the general slump in the price of coffee on the world market; it would merely create less foreign exchange, despite the increase in production that might result from the extra investment.

Managed liberalization of trade: Price controls on all domestically produced goods should be lifted; this should also be considered for imported goods required by the productive sector (agriculture and industry). But import liberalization should not be indiscriminate. Policy makers should be selective and develop a well-organized phased liberalization strategy geared towards supporting the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase mentioned above and towards permitting local firms to grow and become competitive within a certain defined period. This is particularly important for the allocation of foreign exchange. Rehabilitation will fail if scarce foreign exchange is squandered on biscuits and imported mineral water while road building is stopped because of the shortage of foreign currency to buy oil or spare parts.

Reforming the bureaucracy: Streamlining the bureaucracy must proceed after a careful review of the impact of massive redundancy on management and implementation capacity. A system of reward has to be introduced to retain productive workers, allow early retirement, limit new hiring and encourage the early departure of temporary workers. The reform should also include the retraining of personnel who have lost their jobs and their redeployment in activities that support the rehabilitation and reconstruction effort.

Increased prices for farmers: Agricultural production (including for export) should be increased by paying more to the producers and by a commitment on the part of the government to annual increases of set percentages. It is essential, however, that this be backed up with more inputs and better institutional support (for example, extension of fertilizers). The use of devaluation as a means of rewarding peasants should be avoided during the rehabilitation phase; this is because its immediate impact would be to increase the costs to peasant producers of inputs and transport, thus encouraging export crops at the expense of food security.

Government budget: The programme should aim to redirect expenditure from non-productive to priority sectors; the latter include

agriculture, health, education, revenue collection and infrastructure maintenance. The collapse of the Mengistu military apparatus, which used to consume over 60 per cent of government expenditure, has made the task of preparing the national budget somewhat easier, though many economically useless parastatal boards and state farms still need to be closed down, or their functions consolidated to save resources. No new projects, other than those relating to rehabilitation and reconstruction, should be started during the transition period and those already planned should be abandoned. A review of outdated investment and labour codes should be undertaken and a new system of investment selection adopted.

At the same time efforts should be made to generate more revenue. Better tax collection and assessment measures, requiring citizens to pay nominal fees for some social services, are considered necessary. The tax burden should be more fairly distributed, with the poor and needy being given sufficient access to tax exemptions to guarantee food security.

Privatization of parastatals and state farms: Removing functional duplication between government institutions and parastatals is one way of generating revenue and improving administrative efficiency. After careful review of their performance, parastatals that have never made a profit should be liquidated and their functions transferred to the private sector. In fact, by selling off loss-making parastatals and state farms to private investors, the government should be able to avoid incurring huge debts resulting from direct subsidies. To facilitate this, a Privatization Commission should be set up as soon as possible to prepare a divestiture strategy.

To avoid further deterioration of equipment and other capital stock, state farms should be privatized and sold to local entrepreneurs or joint ventures without delay. In other cases, it will be necessary to distribute the land to the most land-hungry peasants.

Decentralization: Most important is the principle of building on local initiatives and of developing local resources with local manpower. Among other things, this requires a local bureaucracy accountable to the peasants, local administration to support individual and collective local initiatives, and a local administration to facilitate communications between the peasants and the central authorities. Though peasants must

be guaranteed the security of their land, the land should remain a national resource and not be turned into a commodity. The government should have no illusions about the difficulties of implementing such a policy. There is bound to be conflict and obstruction as different social coalitions position themselves to take advantage of (or avoid the negative effects of) one policy or another. In all this it is important to keep the interests of the peasants in sight. At every stage of the process we should ask ourselves: What would this mean to the peasants? And how would it affect their productivity?

Long-term development: Policy reforms to improve financial balances and price structures are not enough to redress Ethiopia's problems. The reforms need to take into account the special circumstances of the country; in transforming the economy and society they must be able to provide a sustainable future. The economic recovery programme must place great emphasis on the alleviation of poverty and on improving the welfare of the people, who are the principal resource on which to build. It should ensure that the people have a significant voice in shaping the development process and acknowledge that the provision of health care, education and training are the basic building blocks of this approach (Fantu 1992).

Priority Areas

Agricultural Reform

Addressing the cluster of issues associated with agricultural productivity and environmental degradation must be given top priority in any transformation strategy for Ethiopia. Priority should be given to food and livestock production and to distribution, including exports. There should also be some assurance that food is not only available but that people have the means to acquire it. This requires the provision either of employment or access to productive land, which in turn points to the vital importance of improving the sectors that support agriculture. This would include developing agro-related industries and improving transport and other aspects of the physical infrastructure in the rural areas. A significant proportion of the national budget must be assigned to this important sector. Action should include:

Land reform: Given the country's meagre industrial base and limited opportunities for non-agricultural pursuits, land is the only productive

asset available to the majority of the rural population. It is therefore of utmost importance that it is distributed equitably and that security of tenure is clarified through legislation. While advocates of land reform may favour introducing western-style property rights, the commoditization of land would turn the clock back to the situation before the 1974 revolution. It would bring back the former landlords, open up the possibility of large-scale peasant evictions and thus create a massive influx of pauperized and destitute migrants into the towns. Enforcement measures should be included in the legislation to prevent future inequalities emerging. The legislation should also empower local communities to formulate their own land-use plans (with the help of the Ministry of Agriculture) and demarcate land for cultivation, forestry and livestock production.

Export diversification: Structural adjustment policies in other African countries have tended to expand traditional exports at the expense of food production for local needs; and because dozens of countries are told to do the same thing at the same time, such policies have contributed to the general decline in commodity prices (Fantu 1989). Production for export should therefore not be encouraged where elasticities are low. Moreover, export crops should only be encouraged over and above the food requirements of the peasantry; they should not be produced at the expense of food security and peasant self-sufficiency. In the meantime, it would be helpful to establish an export diversification commission to study potential areas of export diversification and to recommend concrete action. The findings and recommendations of the commission could form an important element in negotiations with donors. Donors and financial institutions should commit themselves to adapting their lending to support these programmes.

Institution building: The agricultural supportive services (extension, research, marketing and credit) are ineffective in Ethiopia and need to be strengthened. Methods of allocating resources should be more effective and facilities and equipment should be made available to improve their analytical and service delivery capability to small-scale farmers. This can be achieved by giving institutional support to the training of extension agents, by setting up sectoral and management planning departments and by improving logistical support. Services

must be geared towards the needs of small peasants. Extension agents need to change their attitude towards the peasants; they need to regard themselves as their helpers rather than their superiors.

Access to infrastructure and services: The majority of Ethiopian farmers are isolated, lacking access to the basic services that could improve their productivity. Lack of access to extension services, fertilizers, storage, roads, credit and other supports has been the main impediment to increased agricultural production and improved management of land and water. Improving access to these essential services will go a long way towards arresting the process of land degradation and declining agricultural production in Ethiopia.

Strengthening agricultural research: Research should be reoriented toward solving the problems facing peasant agriculture in Ethiopia by involving the peasants themselves in the decision making and by tapping their knowledge of their environment. Research into drought-resistant crops and yield-increasing agricultural innovations can reduce pressures on marginal lands. Top priority should be given to improving traditional tilling techniques and adjusting them to local soil conditions. Integrating new and improved methods of soil and water conservation into the peasant's production cycle is also of utmost importance.

Addressing the problem of women farmers: National programmes designed to increase food security and preserve the natural resource base in Ethiopia must reach women if they are to succeed. Efforts must be made to improve women's access to productive resources, and to re-orient agricultural training as well as other supportive services to solve the problems of women farmers.

Credit: Credit is a dangerous institution for poor peasants, especially if land is accepted as security. Experience shows that debts have frequently been used to deprive peasants of their land and property. Credit schemes for small peasants should use collective security agreements or a credit insurance to protect peasants in case of unwilful default.

Environmental Protection

Forest and land resources: The forested area of Ethiopia occupies only around 4 per cent of its total land area. The alarming pace of forest degradation is mainly due to the expansion of agriculture, past over-

exploitation of forest resources without proper management, pressure from ever-increasing human and animal populations, forest fires, pests and diseases. This has resulted in soil erosion and sedimentation, a breakdown of watershed functions and an acute shortage of fuelwood, poles and construction materials (Woods 1990: 187–98). A 1986 FAO study estimated that over 1900 million tons of soil are lost from the Ethiopian highlands annually. If the trend continues, by the year 2010 some 38,000 square kilometres will be eroded down to bare rock and a further 60,000 square kilometres will have a soil depth of ten centimetres or less, making it too shallow to support cropping (FAO 1986). The report concluded that, as a result, approximately ten million people, or 15 per cent of the highland population, will be destitute by the year 2010.

Given these alarming trends, considerable emphasis should be placed on the need to reverse ecological degradation and improve agricultural output in an ecologically sound manner. Significant public resources should be shifted towards rehabilitating and conserving natural resources, i.e. towards soil conservation and forestry development. The programme must be developed with a view to ensuring that local communities ultimately take responsibility for managing their natural resources. This means that the government needs to give concrete support to popular peasant organizations. Well-planned public works programmes to combat deforestation and soil erosion must be put in place. Thousands of unemployed youths and peasants could be trained and deployed to this end. Along with the conservation measures, investment should be geared towards improving water management and availability in both rural and urban areas. The construction of small dams and the sinking of boreholes and wells should be intensified to counter the effects of an uncertain rainfall.

All environmental protection measures must be integrated into the existing agricultural and social system; they must be planned and accomplished with and by the peasants. Ecology that competes for land at the expense of peasant cultivation will not be accepted. Peasants must learn to improve their living conditions and the fertility of their land by planting trees and terracing slopes. Such measures open the way to a more intensive multi-purpose use of rural resources. The Ministry of Agriculture should survey village land so that the local authorities, in consultation with local communities, can systematically allocate it to agriculture, livestock, forestry or conservation. With appropriate government support, environmental conservation could

become a growth industry, potentially employing thousands of rural people.

Easing fuelwood shortages: There is an interrelationship between the energy, ecological and agricultural crises. In Ethiopia's urban areas people are increasingly spending more money on fuelwood and charcoal than on food. More time is spent foraging for wood and twigs than on income-producing activities. Until something is done to relieve the fuelwood shortage there is no hope of making even a dent in the ecological and food crises. Efforts must be made to introduce efficient stoves suitable for specific locations, supported by strong extension, demonstration and promotional activities. The technology introduced must be simple and easy to reproduce using local materials, and must be cheap enough for poor people to buy. This could drastically reduce the use of agricultural residue for cooking and become a growth industry potentially employing thousands of people in both rural and urban areas.

Population and family planning programmes: Population growth and the shortage of arable land have compounded the environmental and agricultural crises in Ethiopia. Socio-cultural traditions, religious beliefs, illiteracy and low household incomes, as well as a lack of family planning services, all hamper the progress of population policies (Markos 1990: 156–63). Both donors and the Ethiopian government should make available increasing resources to strengthen existing family planning services while trying to improve access to productive employment. Raising the education status of women and girls should also be accorded priority.

Diversification of Economic Activity

Besides increasing opportunities in small-scale agriculture, attention must be paid to generating and expanding employment in non-agricultural sectors. With the population growth and shortage of arable land, an aggressive effort is needed to develop rural industries (agro-processing, packaging, construction, transport, services) and to produce agricultural inputs, tools and consumer goods to serve the rural population. Localizing the production of inputs and delivery will have a positive impact on the performance of the agricultural sector. Action is also required to improve public works, such as secondary roads, reforestation and soil conservation, and to provide clean water supplies, rural

electrification, public health clinics, schools and agro-service centres. These activities would strengthen the internal working of the national economy by stimulating the production and consumption of local goods and services.

Deepening the Process of Democratization

If the dignity and vitality of Ethiopians is to be restored, people at all levels must have the right to establish and manage their own cooperatives and organizations (for example, for women, youths, workers and consumers). These local level organizations need to be given greater control over the allocation of resources, the disbursement of funds intended to benefit them, and the appointment and control of officials meant to serve them. This important principle is incorporated in three useful documents (World Bank 1989b; ECA 1989; and the joint ECA and African NGO 1990). Without such changes, national policies will continue to be dominated by well-placed influential interest groups.

These local organizations must also find ways to organize for the purpose of gaining influence at national level, opening channels of communication and representation of peasant interests up to the top level.

Supporting Popular Organizations

Government agencies cannot do all that is expected of them, particularly in times of financial crisis. Special efforts must be made to upgrade and employ the services of local and international non-governmental organizations, cooperatives and women's organizations, which are better placed than public agencies to stimulate change at the local level. But for these organizations to succeed, both the Ethiopian government and the donor communities must make more resources available to them for, among other things, training and technical assistance. Where there are no extension agents, non-governmental organizations can fill the vacuum. They can train peasants in various agro-forestry and soil conservation techniques and can set up new demonstration centres and nurseries close to villages at a fraction of what it would cost the state.

Human Resource Development

The state of education in Ethiopia is distressingly inadequate. The dynamic growth in quantity since the revolution (despite severe budgetary restrictions) has been achieved at the expense of quality. And the

poor quality of education today has serious implications for the tasks of tomorrow. The educational system requires fundamental reform and an infusion of funds and manpower to make it consistent with the overall development needs of the country (Tekeste 1990). This must be followed by a plan to ensure that new curricula are designed to encourage a closer relationship between the requirements of the economy and its output. There is an urgent need to expand technical and vocational education and to retrain school leavers and this must be accorded priority.

Education, especially at primary level, must concentrate on work, i.e. on teaching the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the process of economic development. In particular, it should disseminate skills adapted to local agriculture that can upgrade rural production.

Tips on Designing Educational Policy in Times of Financial Crisis: The above suggestion is not meant to imply that the government should continue to subsidize education across the board. More expenditure is unlikely in an environment of financial restrictions. What is needed is expenditure reduction tied to intrasectoral expenditure switching policies, cost recovery initiatives, better utilization of manpower, and decentralization of responsibility to local authorities (Adams 1989: 50–4). For example, cost recovery policies at the secondary and university levels should be tied to expenditure increases at primary level, which is usually underfunded.

Cost recovery: This should take place at the post-primary level. Introducing fees and getting rid of free boarding privileges are some of the measures to be introduced. Special vouchers or scholarship programmes could be instituted to assist those in need.

Expenditure switching: Capital spending on primary schools ought to be increased while freezing such spending at post-primary level. It is, however, important that maintenance be continued at all levels to avoid further deterioration.

Charging fees for subjects (or courses) not central to manpower areas: The decision to invest in such subjects is left to the individual.

Administration: Local authorities should have ultimate responsibility for capital expenditure, as well as for recruiting staff and deciding what

incentives or penalties to use to retain teachers. They are likely to allocate and utilize their resources better than central administrators in a far-away capital city. The Ministry of Education should merely set the standards and monitor the curriculum.

Educational subsidies: The state should stop subsidizing the university and other specialized schools (such as agricultural and training institutions). Instead, loans, tuition waivers in exchange for services to society on graduation and other compensatory mechanisms should be instituted. In a society where access to basic education is limited, using taxpayers' money to subsidize a future elite cannot be justified on equity grounds. A decision to invest in higher education should be left to the individuals concerned and should be based on their expected earning capacity. Students could choose to borrow money, which they pay back at a predetermined rate when they are eventually employed. Others could pursue their education free in exchange for five years of government service. Those with the means to pay could enrol at the universities and pay annual tuition fees determined on the basis of costs.

Vocational training: Public resources would be better utilized in less formal, but well-designed educational and vocational training programmes. This would generate employment in sectors capable of stimulating labour-intensive production of basic consumer goods and inputs to agriculture and other sectors of the economy.

Social Dimensions of Adjustment: What are the Remedies?

The prospects for employment inherited by the new government are grim. Approximately half a million unskilled young men will enter the labour market following demobilization. Each year another 200,000 school leavers try to join the labour force. In addition, the privatization and liquidation of numerous state corporations will cost many thousands of people their jobs.

With increased prices and the removal of subsidies for basic necessities, the transition period will be very difficult. To avoid a complete breakdown of civil society and to safeguard the democratization process, there is an urgent need for well-designed better-targeted food subsidies and employment and income-generating schemes. The donor community has a special responsibility to fund programmes that will help the rural and urban poor to feed themselves.

In contrast to other social protection programmes, such as the food coupon programme in Zambia (see Geisler 1991) and the PAMSCAD programme in Ghana (data collected by myself during a trip in July/August 1990), which are designed to keep people afloat, the Ethiopian programme should be linked to the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction discussed previously. The best way to alleviate poverty is to expand employment opportunities, not to pacify people through food stamp programmes. In addition, in a country like Ethiopia, where basic census data are missing, it would be very difficult to identify and target assistance to 'vulnerable groups'. Who is to decide which categories of people should or should not qualify? And on what basis? Apart from a small group of merchants who made their fortune through speculation because of their ties with the Derg, the whole population can be categorized as vulnerable.

Instead of regarding women and the poor as 'vulnerable groups' – implying that they cannot help themselves – planners should begin to think of the vast majority of the Ethiopian poor as important resources for development. The Ethiopian poor are capable of constructing a new economic and social reality. They will be able to minimize the negative effects of structural adjustment if they are mobilized to help themselves, with strong government support in the provision of land, training and capital, rather than treated as passive recipients of policies formulated in a far-away capital city. Most people can be helped to stay in their own communities and to earn an income by participating in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of these communities. Appropriate measures might include:

- public works programmes to upgrade the physical infrastructure. This would include building secondary roads, irrigation channels, small dams and reservoirs, expanding clean water supplies and introducing rural electrification;
- public works programmes for environmental protection. This would cover activities such as building check dams, reforestation, soil conservation and water harvesting;
- encouraging small-scale village industries based on local materials, technology and skills, and the use of an indigenous apprentice system;
- expanding and initiating income-generating activities in the informal sector. Ways must be found for the unemployed to get material, training and credit to start up a business; and

- redeploying people to assist in the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons until they begin to care for themselves.

Apart from providing gainful employment, these activities directly contribute towards increasing agricultural production, environmental conservation and social welfare. Each of these tasks must be initiated in consultation with local communities. The communities themselves should identify project areas that require rehabilitation, and thus request from the central government either supplementary funds to hire unemployed people in the community, or for a work brigade to be sent there. To ensure quality control and contain cost, technical assistance and timely delivery of inputs and materials must be emphasized and supported. In this respect, the disastrous failure of the former government's highly advertised national tree-planting campaign is a good reminder not to rush into a project unless it comes from a local community initiative and has adequate technical backup.

Coping With Urban Unemployment

The most difficult challenge the government will face during the adjustment period is how to tackle urban unemployment in the main towns. The problem can partly be alleviated by adopting a comprehensive national urban upgrading programme with two components – stimulating the housing industry and supporting the urban informal sector.

Stimulating the housing industry: It is difficult to ignore the physical deterioration of the capital city and other secondary towns. After years of neglect, millions of private dwellings, offices, hotels and shops are in complete disrepair. A repeal (or partial amendment) of the 26 July 1975 Urban Lands and Extra Urban Houses Proclamation can offer a partial solution (Government of Ethiopia 1975). Returning these buildings to their rightful owners, introducing buy-back schemes, or complete privatization are the best ways of saving them from collapsing. This could stimulate the construction industry and generate employment for thousands of people, but only if other loan guarantee programmes are put in place and a simpler way of procuring supplies and building materials is found. A construction boom would expand the market for essential goods and create demand-led inward industrialization.

The repeal of the law should be discriminate, with policies targeted at properties with a high potential for generating employment when

renovation resumes. Although this action might be interpreted by some as a giveaway – a reward to former landlords – a radical revision of property tax laws can generate far more resources than the meagre rent the state currently collects from these properties. A rush to return properties to their previous owners, however, could cause dislocations and widespread homelessness, particularly in Addis Ababa where affordable housing is in short supply.

Legal measures are necessary to protect current occupants from arbitrarily being thrown out into the streets. In the meantime, the central government and individual municipalities should develop specialized (yet profitable) projects designed to expand the housing stock in urban areas and to enable those on low incomes to become owners. This is assuming everybody wants to stay in the city. However, with a new land reform, it is possible many may decide to go back to the land rather than face prolonged unemployment in the city. The lack of data makes it difficult to determine housing needs in the major municipalities and to develop well-articulated schemes.

An urban development sector loan (URBANSECAL) should be negotiated separately. This would be used on public works projects (such as squatter upgrading), building apartments and houses for the private sector, and improving sewage, water supplies, roads and other infrastructure.

Support to the urban informal sector: Special efforts must be made to expand employment and income-generating activities in the informal sector. The support should be targeted where it will stimulate labour-intensive methods of producing basic goods for low-income groups. To improve the delivery of services, the government should organize individuals in the informal sector on the basis of their preferred sectoral specialization. A better-organized informal sector is in a better position to demand services from the municipal government. The municipal government, on its part, has a vested interest in generating revenues from the informal sector in the form of permits and licensing.

No matter how serious urban unemployment becomes, the authorities should not attempt to take the unemployed off the streets by forcing them onto half-baked programmes such as ‘Operation Feed Yourself’, or other such campaigns, which were unsuccessfully tried in Ghana and Mozambique. Such programmes have never worked anywhere and are inconsistent with the values of a democratic society. It is important to realize that people are Ethiopia’s most important asset. The poor and

misgoverned are the very people to make possible the transition from tyranny and hopelessness to a more dignified and equitable social order.

Other Priority Areas: The task of transforming the Ethiopian economy and society rests with the Ethiopians themselves. Without external help, it will at best be a slow and cumbersome process. The real question is whether enough external help will be available and whether it will be on terms compatible with Ethiopian aspirations. This remains to be seen. In the meantime, the donor community can take significant measures to ease the debt burden. Given Ethiopia's foreign-exchange crisis and low import capacity, donor countries could free up needed resources by writing off official debts. Although the multilateral banks' current rules bar the rescheduling of debts owed to these institutions, considering Ethiopia's special circumstances, the World Bank would no doubt be able to find ways around such a restriction. With regard to the Eastern bloc debt, I personally want to see a unilateral declaration of default by the Ethiopian government. The Soviet Union as we knew it no longer exists. Even if payment of the debt were possible, to which treasury should the government make the payment? To the Russian Republic? To Moldavia? To the Ukraine? Or to the newly liberated Baltic states? In fact we should be asking for reparation from the Soviet Union for having participated in the destruction of Ethiopia. If the Soviets want to get their investment back, they can do it easily. They can do so by picking up the millions of dollars worth of wrecked military equipment littering the Ethiopian landscape.

Donors could also help during the transition period by providing supplementary funding to strengthen Ethiopia's planning and management capacity. Useful contributions here would include institutional support for training staff, upgrading data gathering and analysis systems, and a whole range of supplies and materials from paper clips to xeroxing facilities. In addition, donors should increase the number of technical assistance personnel by seconding high-calibre management technicians, financial analysts, privatization experts and trade specialists to key sectoral ministries until local capacity can be built. However, foreign technical assistance personnel should be accountable to the people for whom they work, not to their home government or institution. With liberalization and political democratization, many of the government's best and most competent civil servants are likely to be lured away by the high salaries and better benefit packages of the

private sector. Without good management expertise on the ground, successful implementation of the economic recovery programme will be very difficult.

9. Small Urban Centres and their Role in Rural Restructuring

Jonathan Baker

The point of departure for this chapter is that small towns can play a decisive and positive role in rural development, provided that government policies and the macro-economic framework are favourably disposed to using small urban centres as vehicles for rural change and transformation. (For an elucidation of this idea, see, for example, Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1988; Rondinelli 1988; Baker and Claeson 1990.) However, it is the quality of the state's policies and of a few central actors located in the small towns that makes the difference, not the towns as such. This is what ultimately decides whether small towns act as centres of exploitation for rural populations or whether they provide a central component in rural progress.

In this chapter I briefly sketch the history of urban development in Ethiopia over the past 100 years (i.e. since the creation of the Ethiopian state) and then review the totally inadequate contribution of urban development to rural transformation during the period 1974–91 – a period when Ethiopia attempted to produce a socialist society. The final part will consider the nature of urban–rural relations in the present transitional period.

Small Towns and Rural Relations: A Historical Perspective

The modern Ethiopian state was created through a process of internal colonization at the end of the nineteenth century. An alliance of northern Amhara–Tigray colonizers under Menilek II (who ruled as King of Shoa from 1865 to 1889 and as Emperor from 1889 to 1913) subjugated large areas to the south and east of the traditional Christian heartland of Abyssinia. As a result the area of the country was tripled and its population doubled (McClellan 1984: 657) and diverse population groups (in terms of ethnicity, religions, languages and modes of

production) were brought under imperial control. Menilek's desire to create a modern centralized state required the expansion of state revenues; and the extraction of southern resources, such as spices, civet, ivory, gold, hides and coffee, provided him with the means to achieve his ambitions.

To control and administer the newly-acquired territories and their populations, military garrisons (*ketema*) were established (Akalou 1973). Each *ketema* was headed by a military governor and garrisoned by soldiers of the imperial army. Soldiers were rewarded for their services with expropriated land (*rist-gult* and *gult*) and were assigned the labour services of the conquered peoples (for a discussion of the complexities of the land tenure systems which existed in southern Ethiopia, see Cohen and Weintraub 1975; and Pausewang 1973). The establishment of *ketema* created the conditions under which local populations could be indirectly controlled and administered from the newly-established capital of Menilek's empire, Addis Ababa (founded in 1890). Furthermore, these centres provided an efficient method of expropriating rural resources to support the administrative, economic and military modernization of the centralizing state. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the system of exploitative garrison towns was one of the most important elements in extending and articulating central control throughout the colonized regions of the new state.

The *ketema* gradually turned into urban centres. They became functionally more diversified and acquired new roles. Civil administrations and judicial systems were set up and markets, schools, transport services and hotels began to emerge. Menilek's successor, Hayla-Sellase I, who ruled first as regent and then as emperor, carried on the centralizing and modernizing policies of his predecessor. One problem, however, which made unification of the country difficult and hampered the exchange of goods between the various parts of the empire, was the absence of an effective transport network. Indeed, at the time of the Italian invasion in 1935, Ethiopia had only 58 kilometres of all-weather road. The rest of the country had dry-weather roads which became impassable during the rainy season. The situation regarding feeder roads was much worse. As late as the 1960s, 45 per cent of Ethiopia's population lived more than 16 kilometres from an all-weather road.

Although of short duration (1935–41), the Italian occupation of Ethiopia introduced some dramatic changes, which both speeded up and changed the nature of urban development and greatly expanded and improved the road network. The Italians perceived an efficient road

system as a *sine qua non* for the control of their new conquest; they allocated 85 per cent of their East Africa budget to road building (Prost-Tournier 1974: 16). They built new towns, especially around Addis Ababa, and changed the functional characteristics of many existing large and small urban centres. Their fascist racial ideology was translated into a policy of urban segregation in June 1937 after which the towns developed separate quarters for the conquered and conquerors. More positively, the colonial administrators encouraged artisans to settle in towns, and many rural non-farm activities became urban-based. For example, grain milling became much more centralized and generators were introduced. Many urban and rural people who had previously hand-ground their grain brought it to mills in small towns. The Italians had great hopes for the agricultural colonization of Ethiopia. Had their schemes materialized on a grander scale, the growth and functional diversification of many small towns as market centres and providers of goods and services for rural populations would have been very much more spectacular.

With the restoration of Hayla-Sellase in 1941, much of the urban and communications infrastructure developed by the Italians fell into disrepair, mainly as a consequence of resource constraints. However, with the implementation of the First Highway Programme (1951–57) the process of decline was halted and reconstruction began with foreign assistance. Generally, the period leading up to the 1974 revolution can be described as a 'process of controlled modernization' (Baker 1990: 216). Attempts were made to modernize, but not fundamentally alter, an autocratic empire. This failed because few attempts were made to address fundamental issues such as rural–urban inequalities, inequitable land tenure systems, and the absence of a more open and democratic society.

The Wasted Years of Socialism, 1974–91

Much has been written and documented about the period 1974–91. Many of the details need not detain us. But as a backdrop to the present discussion it is appropriate to mention that the main concerns of the military-cum-Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam were as follows:

- to eliminate the structural vestiges of the imperial regime;
- to create a socialist and highly centralized command economy;
- to create a ruling party and state apparatus that would give the

regime legitimacy. The creation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 was an attempt to provide this legitimacy;

- to maintain the territorial unity of Ethiopia, including Eritrea, primarily through the use of force. Mengistu's refusal to compromise on the unity issue and the military successes of the liberation movements eventually led to the regime's collapse in May 1991.

Although they may not appear so, in a number of senses these four concerns were connected. The introduction of wide-ranging rural and urban land reforms got rid of the landlord classes and, consequently, the main structures of the imperial regime and its support. The establishment of local-level, but centrally-controlled institutions such as the urban dwellers' associations (*kebele*) and the peasant associations (*gabarewotch mahber*), enabled the regime to promote its policy of agrarian socialism through collectivization, villagization, resettlement, *zemacha*, mobilization, forced recruitment and obligatory levies for the war effort. A pervasive internal security network silenced open opposition. Eventually, having extracted most of the resources, primarily from the peasant sector, the government was in a position to direct its efforts towards fighting unwinnable wars. Its control and exploitation of the rural and urban sectors was thus an essential element in ensuring that the regime survived for as long as it did.

The Rural and Urban Sectors under the WPE

For the purpose of this discussion, though at the risk of oversimplification, the period 1974–91 can be divided into two distinct phases. In the first, the 'populist phase', the majority of the rural and urban population genuinely supported the regime and benefited from its legislation, which shifted resources and power in its favour. This period covers the rural and urban land reforms of 1975 and 1976 when rural land was nationalized. This meant that landlords were dispossessed of their holdings, except for the legal maximum allowed under the law, onerous tenancy arrangements and other obligations were abolished, and usufructuary rights were distributed to all those willing to till the land. In the urban sector, all land was nationalized and landlordism and the ownership of extra houses were made illegal. The extra housing was transferred to public ownership and any surplus housing rented to those in need. Concomitant with this, all rents were reduced, reflecting the official ideology of social justice and socialism.

Kebele and *gabarewotch mahber* were established in urban and rural

areas to facilitate the distribution of extra housing. But these local-level organizations went beyond redistributing land and housing and became the vehicles through which needs were articulated and, if resources allowed, satisfied. Both *gabarewotch mahber* and *kebele* were supposed to be self-governing and democratically elected, and during the populist period they generally were.

The responsibilities of *gabarewotch mahber* included, *inter alia*, distributing agricultural land (and redistributing it when numbers increased through population growth), conserving land and water resources, building the rural infrastructure (including roads, schools and clinics), conducting literacy campaigns, and collecting taxes. After 1977 more onerous tasks were added. The responsibilities of the *kebele* in the urban areas were very similar to those of the *gabarewotch mahber* and included building and maintaining the urban infrastructure (schools, clinics) and organizing vaccination and literacy campaigns. They also set up *kebele* shops, where subsidized (though rationed) foodstuffs and other necessities could be purchased, and collected rents from tenants in redistributed houses. Until 1981 the *kebele* retained the rents they collected 'for purposes beneficial to the dwellers' (Negarit Gazeta 1975b: 208), the only stipulation being that they had to surrender 15 per cent of all collected rents to the *keftegna*, which was the next tier up in urban local government. Being able to raise and spend their own money gave the *kebele* wide-ranging powers and considerable independence and flexibility at the local level.

In the second phase central control over the rural and urban populations increased. Grassroots democratic ideals were swept aside to make way for unpopular, largely misguided and inflexible experiments in socialism and increasing amounts of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. This phase started in about 1977 for both the rural and urban populations, though in the latter case the actual legislation to formalize the shift in power away from the local authority and towards the centre was only enacted in April 1981 (Negarit Gazeta 1981). This phase ended in March 1990 when Mengistu announced his intention to introduce wide-ranging economic liberalization measures. Below are some brief comments on why the rural and urban sectors had such a dismal record during this second phase.

The Rural Sector

During the 1976-91 period, with the exception of a few years, the agricultural sector performed exceedingly badly and over the whole period

experienced an annual growth of about 0.2 per cent. Equally alarming, food production per capita declined by 14 per cent during the decade from 1980/1 to 1990/1. With a population growth rate estimated at 2.9 per cent per annum, Ethiopia's population will increase by about 17 million in the 1990s to reach over 67 million by the year 2000. The country is presently only about 69 per cent self-sufficient in food and, even with increasing grain imports, many people do not receive the minimum food requirement of 2100 calories a day (Agricultural Donors' Group 1991). Inappropriate government policies, which have been extremely detrimental to the development of a sound agrarian economy, are largely to blame for this dismal situation.

Although the declared intention of the government was the eventual socialist transformation of the agrarian sector, little was achieved in terms of either transforming or socializing the peasant sector. According to the highly optimistic Ten-Year Perspective Plan issued in 1984, over half of Ethiopia's cultivated land was to have been organized into collective farms by 1994 (Mulatu 1990: 205). But as late as 1987 as much as 94.7 per cent of the land was still being cultivated by individual peasant households, while state farms accounted for only 3.5 per cent and collective farms a mere 1.8 per cent (Cohen and Isaksson 1987: 443).

Despite the peasantry's overwhelming resistance to collectivization, the Mengistu regime was convinced of its merits and proceeded to pour money, inputs, extension services, infrastructure and social services into collective and state farms – even though the costs of socialist agriculture far outweighed its benefits in terms of economic criteria. An example will illustrate the point. In 1983 state farms received 76 per cent of all fertilizers allocated to agriculture, 95 per cent of all improved seed and 81 per cent of all credit (Mulatu 1990: 206). Although wheat yields were higher on state farms, 14.6 quintals per hectare, than on peasant farms, 10.8 quintals per hectare, the costs of achieving such productivity far outweighed the benefits (Mulatu 1990: 206). Had the inputs gone to the peasant sector instead, the national food supply position would have been substantially brighter.

Moreover, the Mengistu regime deliberately chose to neglect and disempower the peasantry, presumably in a stick-and-carrot attempt to encourage them to form collectives. Even the service cooperatives failed to deliver the services they were ostensibly set up to provide: inputs, advice and consumer items. The establishment of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) in 1976 and the imposition

of obligatory grain quotas on all *gabarewotch mahber* from 1978/9 were further disincentives to the peasantry. AMC buying prices were generally considerably lower than those on the open market. Peasants faced a constant deterioration in their terms of trade because the prices of the inputs and consumer goods they purchased (if and when available) increased faster than the prices they received for selling their grain to the AMC.

The regime's restrictive approach to private trade and discouragement of rural-urban interaction are also relevant to discussions about the role of small towns in rural development. With the introduction of the AMC and the grain quota system, restrictions were placed on the interregional movement of grain by private traders. This distorted local, regional and national grain markets by creating artificially high grain prices in some markets while in other nearby ones lower prices obtained. As de Waal (1990a: 23) says, 'the price behaviour of grain in one market . . . rarely bears a relationship to the price in the next.' Even traders fortunate enough to obtain licences to trade, he claims (de Waal 1990a: 16), 'were heavily taxed and subject to arbitrary harassment.'

Furthermore, part-time trading was made illegal so that people had to opt to be either a trader or a farmer, but not a combination of both (de Waal 1990a:16). The effect of this was to make employment less flexible and, ultimately, farmers poorer. Ethiopian farmers are traditionally multi-active economically (as in many other parts of Africa) and straddle the rural-urban spheres to take advantage of opportunities provided by both. For instance, farming would be their main activity during the busy agricultural season, while during slack periods they would tend to trade or engage in other activities, perhaps as artisans or casual labourers in a nearby town; or they might even migrate temporarily to seek employment further afield. Though government policies stifled these initiatives, they did not eliminate them completely, for many rural people devised ways of circumventing the regulations. (For an illustration of this, see Baker 1992.)

Another ludicrous policy tried to restrict all the smaller markets to a Saturday and to ban farmers from attending more than one in their locality (de Waal 1990a: 16). This was an attempt to destroy an important characteristic of Third World marketing – periodicity – and thus to prevent farmers and traders from levelling out price differences between markets in close proximity. (For a discussion of periodic markets in northern Ethiopia in the pre-revolutionary period, see Messing 1962:

386–408; and Baker 1986: 267–327). These policies were intended to regulate and control market forces (i.e. to ensure that food supplies reached the urban population and the army, and to avoid exploitative profits by traders and, as a corollary, to promote socialist ideology). The results, however, were market fragmentation, distortions and scarcities.

The urban sector

Although members of the urban elite managed to retain their privileged positions, the standard of living of the majority of urban dwellers deteriorated considerably, especially during the 1980s.

As I indicated earlier, in the late 1970s the *kebele* lost their important local decision-making powers and became vehicles through which the central government enforced its dictates. This increased control over the *kebele* was formalized in Proclamation 206 of 1981, which stated in its preamble that 'it is necessary to make urban dwellers' associations receive their guidance from one centre' and that 'lower bodies *shall observe and implement decisions passed by higher leading bodies*' (emphasis added).

Moreover, the *kebele* lost their important right to spend the rents they collected (as well as other monies raised through selling *kebele* grass and trees, and fines levied in *kebele* courts). Instead all revenues had to be surrendered to the central authorities. Small, wholly inadequate subventions were then returned to the *kebele* with which they were supposed to maintain existing or construct new dwellings, retain the *kebele* infrastructure and support general development schemes, including income-generating projects. Thus, from this date onwards, any pretence to *kebele* autonomy, self-government and local development disappeared. Like the *gabarewotch mahber*, the *kebele* became mere extensions of central government, with all the limitations that this implied.

Thus, during this second phase, the urban sector failed to provide the dynamism necessary to stimulate rural development. Misguided government policies were largely to blame. Below are some brief comments on the kinds of roles that towns developed or maintained.

- It is certainly true that small towns took on new functions, while the more established ones, such as private grain marketing and grain bulking, declined. Many small towns assumed new administrative

and bureaucratic responsibilities; the *kebele* and WPE opened offices and the AMC organized the collection of rural grain quotas. Some places, particularly in Eritrea, Tigray and Wallo, developed into sizeable garrison towns for the Ethiopian army, which was attempting to contain rural insurgents. De Waal (1990b: 17) interestingly illustrates how the presence of a military garrison in the town of Halhal (north-west of Keren) in Eritrea gave local traders an opportunity to sell items such as watches and tape recorders to the soldiers and then to use the profits to grow irrigated vegetables, which in turn stimulated local employment.

- Rural males in Ethiopia have traditionally found temporary off-farm employment in small towns, whereas the females generally secured more permanent jobs. This migration to small towns to work in low-paid jobs continued during the Mengistu period despite the constraints. These included a plethora of administrative controls (imposed by *gabarewotch mahber* and *kebele* alike) and the risk of losing their entitlement to land if they stayed away from the rural area for too long to reclaim their usufructuary rights on return. For males, the more usual urban occupations included collecting and carrying fodder, portering in markets, artisanal work, and burning and selling charcoal – though the regime made the latter activity illegal and it may therefore have subsequently declined in importance as a job option. It should be stressed that if males coming to town could not prove that they were gainfully employed, they risked being conscripted into the armed forces or involuntarily selected for resettlement.

Small towns in Ethiopia have always offered rural women permanent employment opportunities in domestic work, spinning, brewing and selling *tela* (the local beer), petty trading and prostitution – the latter is a common survival strategy for rural (and urban) women. Unlike most African countries, Ethiopian towns, both small and large, tend to contain more women than men. This phenomenon has been commented on (Gugler 1989), but little attempt has been made to explain why it happens. While no single explanation has been found, the answer may lie in a series of interlinked factors. In rural Ethiopia there is very little paid employment for women outside agriculture, and even in agriculture the only opportunities are in harvesting and threshing – cultivation is an entirely male activity. Early marriage is common, particularly in the northern regions, and divorce rates are high.

Although women and men have equal land rights, cultural and capital constraints have prevented them from making full use of this resource. Culturally, and also because of the heavy nature of the work, women are excluded from ploughing the dominant production mode in most areas of Ethiopia. Although Mengistu banned the use of hired labour, this did not apply to women 'with no other adequate means of livelihood' (Negarit Gazeta 1975a). However, since people need resources to hire labour and, as important, to own or have access to oxen for plough cultivation, this did not provide the many disadvantaged rural women with a viable alternative. Thus, employment options for Ethiopian women in rural areas are very limited and many migrate to nearby towns, where the chances of survival are much greater. To complete the argument, in most other African countries, where hoe cultivation is the norm, women are central actors in agriculture, which requires neither the labour services of men nor a relatively sophisticated and expensive technology such as the ox plough.

It would be churlish to suggest that nothing positive was achieved during the Mengistu period. For a start, the government's health and educational targets show that the regime recognizes the need to address certain fundamental issues relating to human well-being. The expansion of health facilities and the employment of health personnel in small towns is a case in point. In 1973, between 15 and 20 per cent of the population had reasonable access to a health facility within ten kilometres: by 1982 this had increased to 48 per cent (Mehari 1988: 52; Haile 1988: 58). Moreover, public health programmes and widespread immunization and literacy campaigns have benefited rural and urban populations. It should be emphasized, however, that health and welfare issues cannot be divorced from prevailing socio-economic conditions and that improving real incomes and expanding employment opportunities can do much to promote health.

The treatment of the rural and urban sectors as separate entities in this discussion is intentional and has been done because the Mengistu regime deliberately compartmentalized rural and urban life in an attempt to maximize its own efficiency and control.

How real is Urban Bias in Ethiopia?

Since the creation of Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century, the resources of the peasant sector have been expropriated to cater for the demands of the urban elite and to finance modernization and the central state apparatus. During the Mengistu era rural resources were also used

to finance an increasingly costly war. Some writers have explicitly or implicitly suggested that contemporary Ethiopia is characterized by urban bias (see Lipton 1977). This is said to exist when, for example, government policies distort revenue raising and expenditure patterns in favour of urban populations and simultaneously divert and drain resources away from rural populations. The concept of urban bias is, however, increasingly being questioned (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 1991: 22).

Huge amounts of scarce capital have been invested in large urban-based projects in Ethiopia – in big hospitals, capital-intensive industries, improving water supplies, upgrading the airport. The following data clearly illustrate this skewed investment flow. In 1985, the capital city of Addis Ababa, which contains 3.4 per cent of the national population, received 36.5 per cent of the total national health budget, which on a per capita basis amounted to 26.4 birr. By contrast, the administrative region of Sidamo, with 9.0 per cent of the national population, received 4.2 per cent of the national health budget, which on a per capita basis amounted to 1.1 birr (calculated from data in Haile 1988: 64). In more concrete terms, these differentials in health expenditure patterns reveal a ratio of population to hospital beds in Addis Ababa of 418:1 and in Sidamo of 8595:1. In Addis Ababa, there was one doctor for every 3945 people; in Sidamo the figure was one for every 140,391. In Addis Ababa, there was one nurse for every 1772 people, while in Sidamo the figure was one nurse per 23,113 people (Central Statistical Authority 1990; Office of the Population and Housing Census 1984).

Investments in industrial capacity show a similar concentration. For example, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Ethiopia's largest and second largest cities respectively) contain 60 per cent of the formal sector industrial labour force and create more than 60 per cent of the national manufacturing value added (UNIDO 1991: 51). Moreover, state-owned industrial enterprises employed just over 90,000 people, representing less than 0.5 per cent of the total economically active population and only 5.9 per cent of the economically active population in urban areas (UNIDO 1991: 31).

Such examples tend to suggest that there has been a polarization of rural and urban populations and that the former has been impoverished as a direct consequence of favouring the latter. Yet this characterization is misleading. Most investments have been directed to Addis Ababa and other large urban centres, while modern health facilities and formal-sector industrial capacity are seriously lacking in the smaller urban

centres. Moreover, there is the question of what part of the urban population, even in cities, has access to and can afford to take advantage of the benefits of these investments. In other words, how have the benefits of such investments been distributed? The contention here is that a small elite of city dwellers has actually benefited from such investments, while the majority of urban people have not, as a result of their poverty and powerlessness.

Data assembled by the World Bank on urban poverty present an alarming picture of widespread deprivation at all levels of the urban hierarchy. The World Bank (1989a: 6) estimated that, in 1987, 65 per cent of households in Addis Ababa (based on an average of 5.5 persons) lived below the absolute poverty threshold of 238 birr per month. While this figure is dramatic, urban deprivation in smaller towns is even greater (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1:
Levels of Household Poverty in Selected Ethiopian Towns

<i>Town</i>	<i>Population (1988)</i>	<i>% of households living below absolute poverty threshold</i>
Ambo	19,900	69
Arsi-Negele	16,400	69
Assela	40,100	79
Goba	28,600	77
Kobe	14,600	71
Mizan Teferi	7,600	86
Shashemene	41,300	79
Wollisso	19,700	77
Ziway	7,200	72

Source: World Bank 1989a.

The World Bank suggests that on average nearly 80 per cent of urban household expenditure in Ethiopia is on basic food supplies and fuel alone. This figure is consistent with Lipton's (1988) assessment of poverty, in which he suggests that spending 80 per cent of total household expenditure on food is a measure of being very poor. In the Ethiopian context, then, it is incorrect to see urban bias in terms of polarized urban and rural interests. The polarization is more between

the great majority who are very poor (both rural and urban) and a very small group of urban-based elites. It is therefore more appropriate to think in terms of an elite bias.

Recognizing the Role of Small Towns in Rural Development

Becoming conscious of the limitations of its own policies at the small town-rural interface, towards the end of the 1980s the Mengistu government requested assistance from the World Bank in a number of small urban centres (see Table 9.1 for a list of the project towns). In its appraisal report the World Bank attributed the failure of small towns to make a meaningful contribution to rural development to the fact that government policies gave no incentives to the peasant sector to tap the potential inherent in small towns (World Bank 1989a). The World Bank explicitly stated that the paucity of urban centres throughout the country and the poor access of these centres to their rural hinterlands restricted the growth of both urban and agricultural activities. The World Bank probably overemphasized the lack of urban centres in Ethiopia, for the issue is more to do with the failure of existing towns to provide opportunities, goods and services for their inhabitants and nearby rural populations. In other words, we are looking at government restrictions and diverted resources.

The report claims that by supporting employment-generating and income-enhancing schemes in small towns, on the one hand, and by ensuring that the goods and services from these towns are made available to the rural populations, on the other, both sectors would be stimulated. As it puts it (World Bank 1989a: 96), 'the lack of these goods and services in urban areas reduces the attractiveness of the towns to the rural population, as well as having a general disincentive effect on rural production efforts.' It goes on to say that producing more goods and services would make the small towns more attractive to live and work in and thus reduce out-migration to Addis Ababa.

The World Bank put forward a number of policy proposals to make small towns more attractive and to promote dynamism in rural-urban relations. These included improving the urban infrastructure – water supplies, drainage, market places – creating employment and enhancing income by supporting and encouraging small-scale private enterprise and the informal sector, largely neglected because of the government's preference for large state-owned concerns; and improving rural-urban access through the building of feeder roads. The proposals were timely and essential. The project was scheduled to begin in mid-1990 and to

be carried out over a six-year period. However, little had been implemented when the Mengistu regime collapsed in May 1991.

In March 1990, in a final bid to court domestic and international support, Mengistu announced sweeping ideological and economic changes. This attempt at liberalization must be seen as a last-ditch bid by Mengistu to salvage a hopeless situation.

A New Beginning at the Rural–Urban Interface?

The demise of the Mengistu regime in late May 1991 left Ethiopia's transitional government with a busy agenda, with relief and reconstruction as the main priorities. The economy also needed to be freed from the straitjacket of the former regime's policies.

But in addition to these far-reaching possibilities, the transitional government also faces some thorny issues, uncertainties and contradictions that need to be resolved. In May 1992, the various ethnic-based political parties were still fighting each other in the eastern, western and southern parts of Ethiopia, with important elections for the ethnic regions due to take place in June. In the absence of an alternative scenario, this analysis of the transitional period (before the national election, which will take place in mid-1994 at the latest) is informed by the successful conduct of these elections, as well as by the smooth creation of the ethnic regions. Although any discussion of the role of small towns in rural restructuring during the transitional period must involve a certain degree of speculation, events will be strongly influenced by three major economic and political initiatives. These are:

- the economic policy document (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991) released in November 1991;
- the World Bank-led Emergency Recovery and Reconstruction Project (ERRP), which is an attempt by the World Bank and a consortium of foreign donors to provide resources for the reconstruction of the economy (World Bank 1992); and
- the new regional administrations. How can their powers and duties be used to revitalize and realign rural–urban relations?

The economic policy document (TEP) proposes significantly reducing the role of the state in most sectors, including production and trade, encouraging widespread private sector participation, and shifting away from administrative regulation and towards market forces. While the title of the document implies that the policies are only meant to last for

the duration of the transition, it explicitly states that it 'would be open to continuity during the post-transition period with only minor adjustments' and that 'it will also be the basis for longer term economic development' (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 16). In many ways the document is vague and contains conspicuous omissions. There is, for example, little explicit mention of rural-urban relations, or of the role of urban centres in rural development.

From this perspective, therefore, it is convenient to select and briefly address issues contained in the TEP that can have a bearing on the urban-rural interface. First, with respect to agricultural policy, the state will retain ownership of rural land until a referendum is held on the issue after the transition period. Second, there will be no further land fragmentation. Third, peasants are free to sell their produce wherever they want and at whatever price they can obtain. And, finally, the state promises to provide an enabling environment for the peasantry. It will achieve this by constructing a rural infrastructure, providing extension advice, and supplying improved seeds and fertilizers. These initiatives are generally highly commendable. They are likely to help revive and further develop the markets of small towns, improve rural-urban access and stimulate production. The extra incentives of higher prices and more input advice and support should do much to raise farm incomes, increase rural demand for goods and services in small towns, and thereby stimulate urban employment.

One policy that will create problems (and that dogged the Mengistu regime) is the complicated question of the fragmentation of agricultural land, particularly in the land-scarce regions of the north. During the imperial regimes, out-migration from the north to the south to acquire land or to find urban employment was the major means through which land pressure was overcome. For example, between the 1950s and 1970s an estimated one million people migrated from the north because of insufficient land (Kloos and Aynalem 1989: 115). During the Mengistu period, the 1975 rural land reforms gave the peasants usufructuary rights to land. *Gabarewotch mahber* were responsible for redistributing agricultural land to cater for increases in peasant households as a result of population growth. This policy increased land fragmentation and reduced land security. With the threat of a future land redistribution hanging over their heads, peasants had little incentive to invest in and improve their land. Consequently, land degradation was exacerbated. The issue can thus be perceived as a conflict between equity and efficiency.

A policy of no further land fragmentation (as outlined in the TEP) does not solve this conundrum. If further land division is not permitted, what is to become of newly-formed farm households? It is uncertain whether the policy of spontaneous north-south migration, which prevailed during the imperial era, would be a feasible option. Once the new ethnic regions are established, it is unclear whether unrestricted interregional migration would be allowed, especially by the receiving regions, which would give priority to the problems of their own populations. Failure to attend to the needs of the landless would create considerable rural unemployment and exacerbate the inequalities between those with and those without land. Any realistic alternatives would involve greatly expanding the employment and income-generating opportunities provided by small rural towns. Implicitly, the TEP recognizes the potential of so-called 'cottage industries' and indicates that these 'should be accorded special attention' (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 30). The TEP correctly identifies the employment potential of this strategy and recognizes that goods and services provided by the small-scale private sector are low-priced and therefore accessible to many low-income rural groups (see also Dessalegn 1991: 225, who proposes a somewhat similar strategy). Moreover, the TEP recommends (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 30) pursuing 'an industrialization strategy that strengthens linkages with agriculture and that promotes the utilization of domestic raw materials'. It thus addresses a central issue and focuses directly on the complementarity of the rural and small town sectors. I am convinced that such a strategy would yield very positive results. It would open up employment and income-enhancing opportunities to both rural and urban populations and should receive more attention and resources from aid donors.

Given the chaotic state of the economy, in 1991 the transitional government approached the World Bank to obtain financial (and other) assistance for a major relief and rehabilitation effort. The World Bank agreed to its request on condition the Ethiopian government allowed an adjustment programme and policy reforms to follow. The World Bank invited the donor community to participate; a total of nine donors (multilateral and bilateral) agreed and the ERRP took shape. It was launched in March 1992 and is planned to run until about mid-1994. It is a multisectoral operation and is broadly consistent with rehabilitation needs and the role of the private sector as outlined in the TEP.

The ERRP has three main areas of intervention – a production component, a social sector component, and an infrastructure component.

The production component will provide inputs for agriculture, private and public industry and construction. The social sector component will repair damaged educational and health facilities; it will promote two small income-generating pilot activities, one in Addis Ababa and the other in a war-ravaged rural area with a food deficit; and it will organize supplies of structural food aid to urban areas, particularly Addis Ababa. The infrastructure component will rebuild water, telecommunications and power supplies, carry out emergency road maintenance and supply vehicles, spares and petroleum products.

In various ways the ERRP will help fund the TEP's recommendations and the sudden infusion of resources into the economy may well have a 'kick-start' effect. The World Bank-headed consortium obviously believes that the economy will develop a momentum for longer-term development if the enabling environment is improved – by supporting private industry, reconstructing the infrastructure and greatly increasing supplies of fertilizers to the peasants. According to some donor sources in Addis Ababa, the peasant sector should respond quite positively to the great infusion of fertilizers and that, in the medium term, agricultural incomes should increase, leading to a reduction of rural poverty. They are less optimistic, however, about urban poverty and underemployment. Presumably, quite a lot depends on how the small-scale urban sector responds to the incentives offered to it and whether the TEP accords it the special attention it deserves. The ERRP does not address the problem of general urban poverty directly, but suggests structural food aid, particularly to Addis Ababa. There is only one small urban income-generating pilot activity, again in Addis Ababa. The needs of Addis Ababa's poor are no doubt enormous (on World Bank estimates the population of Addis Ababa increased by one million during 1991), but the ERRP should also focus on towns lower down the urban hierarchy, particularly those that interact most with their rural hinterlands.

Any discussion about the new ethnic regions has to take place within a framework of uncertainty. However, legislation detailing the regional administrations' rights and duties and their relationship with the transitional government of Ethiopia was promulgated in January 1992 (Negarit Gazeta 1992). Accordingly, much of the following discussion is based on an interpretation of this legislation. The creation of the new regions will have far-reaching implications: the internal map of Ethiopia will change completely and the repercussions of this will go way beyond the mere redrawing of administrative boundaries. The regional

administrations will have greatly increased powers of decision-making, and will be vested 'with legislative, executive and judicial powers' (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 7). Furthermore, the regions will have powers to borrow money on the domestic market and to raise dues and taxes and, importantly, to spend revenues within the regions. Thus, the regional administrations will possess wide powers of self-government. For itself the central government will reserve foreign affairs, economic policy, conferring of citizenship, the declaration of a state of emergency, printing currency, major development projects, major communication networks, national defence and the deployment of the national army (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 10).

A tentative assessment of the changing nature of rural-urban relations during the transitional period, and within the context of the TEP and ERRP, has already been made. It is appropriate therefore to sketch out the likely impact of the new ethnic regions on rural-urban relations.

First, all regions will need to decide where to locate their regional capitals. For many this should not create any difficulties, especially if their region contains a fairly large diversified urban centre that had functioned as the capital of a former administration. The Amhara Region (Region Three), for example, which is a conglomerate of the former Gondar, Gojjam and Wallo regions, could select Gondar, Debre Marcos or Dessie, which had all been capitals of former regions. Some new regions, however, such as the Somali Region (Region Five), or the Afar Region (Region Two) contain no large urban centres, and the few towns that do exist are extremely small in size and have a narrow range of functions. Moreover, these two regions would need to increase the functional diversity of the few small towns that do exist to give their large pastoral populations more access to markets, veterinary services, off-season employment options and consumer goods. There may also be a need to create new, but small, service centres in certain locations to serve the unmet needs of the pastoralists.

A second issue, which is related to the first, is that with the devolution of power from the central government to the regional administration, many functions that were hitherto invested in the central state in Addis Ababa will now become the responsibility of the regions. There will therefore be an expansion of regional bureaucracies as law courts, police forces, schools and so on are enlarged to cater for the region's needs. Much of this employment expansion will occur in towns and this will add a further dimension to urban employment and income patterns. This may lead to an increase in urban demand for rural produce, and

may stimulate the production of high-quality vegetables and livestock in the immediate hinterlands of these towns. This process will be selective and will depend on which towns are chosen as administrative centres.

Finally, the rearrangement of Ethiopia's internal boundaries will change the economic bases of a number of regions. For example, Region Seven (Gurage, Hadiya, Kembata, Alaba, Timbaro and Yem), Region One (Tigray, Saho and Kunama) and Region Six (Gumuz, Koma, Berta, North Mao and Shinasha) may have insufficient agricultural potential to provide for the food, employment and income needs of their populations. Even before the creation of the new regions, with their structural food deficits, places like Tigray, Hararge and Eritrea would never have been in a position to produce a food surplus using normal economic criteria. It is difficult to predict whether this situation will change now that the borders of Tigray are being shifted westwards to encompass other Tigrigna-speaking areas, but the western additions to Tigray at least contain grain and cotton-producing areas. Despite this speculation, however, an innovative option for these regions would be to emphasize urban-based economic activity as a means of generating regional employment and incomes. This would require a major shift of resources to the urban sector, including skills, infrastructure, capital and firms. Such a strategy might work well in areas such as Tigray and Gurage, which already have an urban structure and a tradition of urban skills. By contrast, the western region of Gumuz appears marginal on most counts and would (according to *Negarit Gazeta* 1992: 17) require subventions from the central government because it cannot pursue 'basic social services and economic development programmes due to relative under-development.'

Conclusion

Small towns could play a beneficial role in rural transformation provided national macro-economic and political frameworks are conducive to such a policy. In Ethiopia, it is traditional for small (and large) towns to extract the rural resources and control the rural populations. Only towards the end of the Mengistu period did the regime seriously consider adopting a more complementary approach and linking small town development to rural change. But by then it was too late for policy interventions at the rural-urban interface to have any impact. The present transitional period is characterized both by opportunity and uncertainty. There is a good deal of change and considerable stress at

the moment, so it is difficult to form a clear picture of the direction in which events are likely to move. However, if the transitional government of Ethiopia's policies succeed (such as TEP and the establishment of ethnic regions), prospects for favourable rural change and improvement at the rural-urban interface are likely to be good.

10. Environmental Degradation, Population Movement and War

Abebe Zegeye

Most of the countries of the Horn of Africa have recently suffered as a result both of natural and man-made disasters, and Ethiopia is no exception. In addition to drought and famine, the country has been ravaged by war, leaving few resources available for dealing with environmental problems endemic to the region. It is important to realize that as far as ecological problems are concerned borders are no barriers, and that in addition to engaging with them at a national level, a regional approach involving inter-state cooperation is surely in the long term essential to their solution.

Although I concentrate on Ethiopia in this chapter, a common core of problems would be revealed by any detailed study of Sudan or Somalia. The forms of political conflict that have destabilized each country may vary, but in each case the problem of environmental security remains paramount if stability in the Horn is ever to have any hope of success.

An acceptable working definition of degradation is the decreasing of the biological productivity expected of a given area of land. Desertification takes place when desert conditions appear where they did not before and soils yield progressively less and less. In Ethiopia, with a total area of 1,248,340 square kilometres, the total land devoted to agriculture is some 18.5 million hectares or 14.8 per cent of the country; 13.1 per cent of the country is under annual crops and 1.7 per cent under perennial. The largest annually cropped area is found in Shawa, while six regions (Shawa, Welega, Gojjam, Gondar, Tigray and Wallo) account for almost 70 per cent. The dominant land use (63.7 million hectares) is livestock grazing by nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists. Sidamo, Hararge, Bale and Eritrea account for over 55 per cent of the grazing lands. The total area covered by woody vegetation is

estimated at 14.6 million hectares, or 11.7 per cent of the country. Of this 3.6 per cent is forest land while the balance is made up of woodland bush lands and shrub lands; 78 per cent of this is located in four regions (Kafa, Illubabor, Bale and Sidamo); 22.5 per cent of the country is classified as currently unproductive, of which 3.8 per cent is unutilizable and 18.7 per cent unproductive. Unproductive land is land that can be made productive, for example, swamps. Unutilizable land cannot be used for rain-fed agriculture because of difficult terrain, severe erosion or lack of adequate moisture.

It is estimated that dry lands in Ethiopia cover 63 per cent of the total land area, with 28 per cent semi-arid, 34 per cent arid and 1 per cent hyper-arid. Drought-prone zones extend over 680,000 square kilometres. Zone One is dry, sub-humid on its moist side and semi-arid on its driest side, and houses 13 per cent of the rural population in the northern region. Of this area, 40 to 50 per cent is under cultivation in the north, 5 to 15 per cent in Hararge, and less than 5 per cent in southern Ethiopia. Zone Two, which is semi-arid to arid, covers 6 per cent of the rural area (160,000 square kilometres) and supports both nomadic pastoralists and isolated spots of cultivation. Zone Three, which extends over 320,000 square kilometres and includes 6 per cent of the total rural population, is primarily used for extensive grazing by nomadic pastoralists.

Drought-prone zones cover significant proportions of the land area and rural population. Areal coverage ranges from a low of 45 per cent in Gamo Gofa and a high of 95 per cent in Eritrea, with an average of 47 per cent. Other estimates of the total area of arid and semi-arid lands in Ethiopia are 88.6 million hectares, classified into irrigated lands (0.03 per cent), rain-fed crop lands (3.9 per cent), and range lands 96 per cent. A high 90 per cent is reported to be affected by desertification, including 16.7 per cent of irrigated lands, 88.6 per cent of rain-fed crop lands and 90.4 per cent of range lands.

Degradation of Dry Lands and Soil Erosion

Total soil loss from different land use and cover types is estimated at between 1.5 and 2 billion cubic metres a year. The most erosion-prone land type is in the currently unproductive areas (3.8 per cent of the total land area), with an annual soil loss of 70 tonnes per hectare, which is equivalent to 22 per cent of the soil loss. The annually cropped areas are the second most erosion-prone, with a soil loss of 42 tonnes per hectare per year. Thus 45 per cent of the total soil loss is generated

from the annually cropped areas covering only 13 per cent of the total land area. The grazing and browsing areas contribute 21 per cent of the total soil loss. The rate of loss varies considerably depending on slope, soil type and vegetation cover, but it can be as high as 400 tonnes per hectare per year (IUCN 1990: 14).

Some 11 million hectares are classified as degraded (8.9 per cent of the total area). The largest degraded areas are in the Weina Dega climate zone, in which 72 per cent of agricultural land is concentrated. The total of potential agricultural land has been estimated to have at least 120 days of plant growth at 60 million hectares, of which 45 per cent is significantly eroded, 23.3 per cent seriously eroded and 3.3 per cent (2 million hectares) has suffered irreversible degradation. IUCN (1990) estimates that in the highlands 25.9 per cent is seriously degraded (54 million hectares), 24 per cent moderately degraded and 3.7 per cent has suffered irreversible degradation. Over half is significantly eroded.

Deforestation

The natural climax forest cover of Ethiopia was first estimated in the 1960s by Breitenbach (1963) at 41.2 million hectares or 37 per cent of the country. UNDP/FAO/LUPRD (1984) estimate the climax forest at 35.4 per cent of the country, divided between coniferous (14.4 per cent), broad leaf (21 per cent), and savannah and woodland (30 per cent). Natural climax forest is estimated to have covered 87 per cent of the highlands (IUCN 1990: 10), but had reportedly been reduced to 40 per cent by the turn of the century and to 15 per cent by 1955.

There is a great disparity between woody resource distribution and centres of population. Illubabor, Bale, Kafa and Sidamo (covering 27 per cent of the total area and housing 20 per cent of the population) have 55 per cent of the potential woody biomass. Hararge, Wallaga, Shawa and Gamo Gofa (37 per cent of the area and 37 per cent of the population) have 28 per cent of the woody biomass, while the remaining six provinces (housing 42.4 per cent of the population) have only 15 per cent of the woody biomass. An estimate of the fuelwood supply/demand balance indicated that a national deficit of 3.8 million cubic metres in 1977 had increased by 438 per cent by 1989 (IGADD 1990). Bale, Gamo Gofa, Hararge, Illubabor, Kafa, Sidamo and Wallaga held a positive balance in 1977, but by 1989 only Hararge and Bale were still positive. It has been estimated that consumption over sustainable yield is 34 per cent, with Gojjam, Gondar and Shawa mining their remaining

forest biomass. Deforestation amounts to 1 per cent per annum. At a national level, 58.7 per cent of *weredas* (local administrative units) were in a critical condition by 1984 and 4.8 per cent were without standing biomass. It has been estimated that by the year 2005 as much as 76 per cent of local *weredas* will be in a critical condition. Eritrea, Gojjam, Gondar, Tigray and Wallo will contain the least amounts of standing stock.

Bale, Illubabor and Kafa (less than 20 per cent of the total area and 10.8 per cent of the population) possess 51 per cent of the total annual sustainable biomass yield. The central, northern and eastern regions (covering 60 per cent of the country and housing 63 per cent of population) possess 23 per cent of the total sustainable yield. As much as 93 per cent of Ethiopia's energy supply comes from biomass, with one third of all energy being derived from fuelwood and charcoal. Between 1970 and 1983 the price of firewood in Addis Ababa rose by 278 per cent to become the highest in Africa. Fuelwood accounts for 77 per cent of total and 81.5 per cent of traditional fuel sources.

The areas of rain-fed agriculture most under pressure from environmental degradation in the Horn lie in the central highlands of Ethiopia. Their thick volcanic soil is inherently fertile and once supported large forests with diversified flora and fauna. A cool climate with ample rainfall attracted early human settlement and mixed agriculture and stock keeping 3000 years ago. The population has been expanding at a rate of 2.9 per cent per annum, the result of partial control of epidemics and a relatively peaceful period immediately after the Second World War. The increases in population together with subdivision have meant that long fallow periods cannot be maintained. Arable land is under continuous cultivation and soil fertilization through organic manuring has become less frequent since dung has become more important as a household fuel. Parts of Eritrea and Tigray are badly eroded, with erosion heaviest on sloping land (Ministry of Agriculture/ FAO 1984). The densely populated and intensively cultivated regions of Gondar, Wallo and northern Shoa are now at the front line of environmental degradation.

In Ethiopia an additional 20,000 square kilometres was put under cultivation during 1966–86 (UNEP 1990) The few mountain chains to have been intensively cultivated for centuries are suffering from severe soil erosion and a rapid depletion of forest and bush cover. Pressures on the cultivated lowlands are consequently of growing severity.

Soil erosion is reducing crop yields by 1 per cent per annum. Bio-

logical degradation (decline in organic matter) is leading to a further 1 per cent reduction. Eroded land has shifted to less productive uses, whereupon crop yields decrease and the nutritional composition of grasses deteriorates. This leads to poor grazing for livestock. The availability of water for crops declines because when land is covered with grass, trees and bushes, it retains more water, which then percolates into the soil and becomes available to the roots of crops. The impact of upland degradation occurs both on and off site. On site there is the loss of agricultural output as land productivity and yield declines and soil is eroded. Off site soil runoff and sedimentation increase and disruption is caused lower down the watershed.

The process of soil erosion in the Ethiopian highlands is exacerbated by natural factors and agricultural practices. Highly erosive rainstorms hit a land stripped bare. There is little cover to the soil; and the form of husbandry, using small seeds of barley, wheat, teff, or sorghum in a fine tilth, has increased vulnerability. A high proportion of rainwater runs off sloping land, taking with it the upper soil, the layer most rich in humus. The nutrient supply in the soil is reduced and water runs downstream. Thus water that should be available for plant growth is lost downstream.

High yields in agriculture are more dependent than ever on an even distribution of rain during critical growth cycles. During the 1980s the opposite tendency prevailed; rainfall was more erratic in distribution. Even when the average is enough, irregular precipitation can lead to crop failure. Between 1985 and 2010 the amount of land incapable of supporting agriculture is estimated to increase from two million to ten million hectares, that is 17 per cent of the highlands. Agricultural production in three-quarters of the *awraja* will be insufficient for subsistence (Ministry of Agriculture 1984, FAO/UNDP 1984).

There was a 4.5 per cent decline in yields overall between 1977 and 1984, with pulses declining by 16 per cent, sorghum by 24 per cent, millet by 21 per cent and teff by 12 per cent. As many as 81 per cent of Ethiopian peasants cultivate less than two hectares of land and there is no alternative to agricultural employment in the areas of high population pressure in the Ethiopian highlands. In the past, large numbers of peasants would migrate to the cotton and coffee plantations, but they are now unable to move because of civil insecurity and strict controls over population movements.

It is not just the defence of the environment against humans that is at stake, but how natural resources can best be managed so that people

can benefit from and optimize their usefulness, as well as maintain and enhance their ability to sustain future requirements (Stahl 1989). It is difficult to improve on the native varieties of crops. Decision making is based on perceived incentives and disincentives within differing time horizons. Incentives are set by government policy and include land tenure systems, administration, regulation, pricing and marketing. Extreme poverty produces a very short time horizon of land use. Degradation is reversible with good local leadership, technical assistance, tools and supplementary food during critical periods. Terracing, hillside closure, tree planting and micro-irrigation assist the process.

With hillside closure vegetation does return in a few years, but the initial vegetation is of low palatability and nutritional value. Grasses decline on slopes planted with trees, thus increasing the pressure on other areas. Uncertainty exists over peasant rights to wood lots and trees. Terracing encroaches on the area available for cultivation and underlines the pressing need for proper management of conservation schemes and security of access for peasants to resources. Soil bunds have proved the most successful form of soil and water conservation and, together with bench terraces along grassed waterways and check dams to lead away surplus water, have reduced the rate of soil erosion and improved water retention. Springs have returned, and such measures have had a positive impact on soil conservation, crop yields and stable production (Yeraswork Admassie 1988). Efficiency is enhanced by using vegetative soil conservation and innovative water engineering, i.e. through a combination of physical and vegetative measures.

Integrating fodder crops and shrubs (such as legumes, forage strips and perennial herbaceous vegetation) into the farming system reduces soil erosion and feeds livestock. The emphasis should be on conservation plus production with year-long water storage, more innovation in water engineering, micro-irrigation to concentrate rainwater infiltration into areas where crops are grown, and collecting seasonal torrents in rock dams which may then be distributed to fields as supplementary irrigation (Harrison 1987).

The major trend is still degradation. Security of land tenure, soil conservation and water engineering must be integrated into coherent management plans. Farmers must be incorporated into research programmes. Although there is still a potential for developing production systems in the degraded highlands area in northern Ethiopia, the realization of this potential would require massive external support. A drastic possibility would be to take selected parts of the land out of production

for some years. Much peasant labour would have to be directed towards rehabilitation work at the expense of food cultivation, resulting in a substantial food deficit. A new approach would therefore have to be designed on the basis of long-term agreements under which peasant associations would undertake to implement rehabilitation programmes in accordance with a plan of operation derived from research findings and agreed upon by all parties. While the peasants would leave the area out of cultivation and close it to grazing, the authorities would undertake to distribute food in compensation for food production foregone by the substitution of rehabilitation efforts for cultivation. Such food would have to be provided by international donors under the auspices of the World Food Programme (Stahl 1989).

In hilly areas, where most of the vegetation and topsoil have disappeared, the only realistic conservation measure may be to plant drought-resistant shrubs with little productive potential. Areas to be rehabilitated must therefore be subdivided according to differing degrees of degradation, and with varying prospects for restoring the production of crops and feed.

In feudal times in Ethiopia grain stores were constantly being plundered, so landless peasants had little incentive to invest in irrigation, terracing or other techniques for conserving water and soil. There was very little surplus production, trade between regions or specialization of production. The new regional approach to environmental security must introduce measures to encourage the specialization of production both within countries and within the Horn itself, which would allow areas to adjust their utilization. This requires political stability, infrastructures, stocks of strategic food reserves, trade links and a common trade policy. All, needless to say, are clearly dependent on the restoration of peace within countries and a greater level of cooperation and trust between them. A regional body dealing with environmental security and food security within the Horn would be well placed to handle several of these key areas.

Resettlement in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia the government has resettled people in an attempt to relieve the pressure on over-cultivated and exhausted lands in the north of the country. The history of famine in Ethiopia goes back for centuries. The first historically documented famine occurred in the thirteenth century and Ethiopia has been struck by cyclical famine ever since. The recent severe famines in 1974/5, 1984/5 and 1990/1 have occurred primarily

as a result of droughts. The droughts were particularly disastrous in that they hit agricultural areas that had already suffered serious environmental degradation and reduced productivity.

Wallo, Tigray and the highlands of Eritrea were most affected by the series of famines and droughts. These regions have experienced a long period of human settlement and over-utilization of the land. Moreover population growth (averaging approximately 3 per cent per year) began to place an unbearable burden on the already denuded highlands. Increased cutting of trees for fuelwood and building left hillsides bare and their topsoil unprotected from heavy seasonal rainfalls.

The 1974 famine brought suffering and death to millions of Ethiopians. It was known as the hidden famine because it was deliberately concealed by Emperor Hayla-Sellase's government to avoid damaging world opinion about developments in Ethiopia. But the famine was secretly filmed and the crumbling monarchy thereby discredited. The new revolutionary regime, the Derg, under President Mengistu Haile Mariam, had to deal with the problems of drought and famine as a matter of urgency. Moving farmers away from the overcrowded hillsides of the famine-affected area to less densely populated areas further south was seen as a long-term solution to the problem of improving land use and food production.

The 1984/5 famine in north Wallo, Tigray and Eritrea presented its own difficulties. These areas were at war with the Addis Ababa government – the Eritrean rebels fighting for independence and the Tigreans for a more democratic government – and critics were alleging that political motivations underlay the resettlement programme. Almost ten million people were affected by the 1984/5 famine. A serious reduction in rainfall over large parts of Ethiopia in 1984 led to a shortfall of about 20 per cent of agricultural production, a loss of about one million tonnes of mainly cereals and pulses. The RRC Cooperative Service Department originally resettled 14,000 families. As a result of the famine, somewhere between 500,000 and two million people were resettled in the three southwestern regions of Wallaga, Illubabor and Kafa.

However, the operation was carried out in haste and without properly assessing conditions in the resettlement areas. Diseases that did not exist in the highlands, such as malaria and tsetse fly, were rife and settlers had little resistance to them. The clay soils were easily compacted and farmers accustomed to working independently were expected to join cooperatives. Not only were some local people hostile, for

example the Ketto in Wallaga, but people from the highlands were unaccustomed to local crops like sorghum and maize. The communal system undermined enthusiasm for farming. Such heavy soil needed lots of hoeing and ploughing, but oxen could not be used because of their vulnerability to disease. Water-borne diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, river blindness, trypanosomiasis and jigger fly infestation were common.

Tensions with the local Oromo population ran high as settlers encroached on local resources. The Bega clan use the land collectively and often leave some of it fallow. This was considered in excess of their needs by the authorities and the land was given to the settlers. Forest, woodland and water resources are utilized collectively in hunting and gathering, but settlers have cut down trees and frightened away the Bega's animals.

These areas do have considerable potential, however, with good soil and adequate rain. Dealing with diseases needs to be assigned high priority. The lands carry the last remaining stands of virgin forest, hence conservation needs to be addressed at the same time as development. To optimize land use in the resettlement areas, the FAO has undertaken detailed reconnaissance studies of soil, slope, vegetation and watershed. Where there is a risk of soil loss terraces and erosion barriers have been built and the farmers have responded favourably to land-use plans.

Environmental Degradation and Conflict in Eritrea

Military activity degrades the environment and so further contributes to the ecological problems of the region. War also causes people to use and assess the environment differently. For example, to one side wood is cover, to the other, a security risk. Eritrea has many problems. Three decades of fighting have resulted in the underuse of traditional farming techniques, disused cash-crop plantations and the underdevelopment of pastoralism. In common with its neighbours, it suffers from an acute land shortage in the densely populated plateau region, shortage of fodder, water and firewood, erratic rainfall, periodic locust infestations and areas of refugee resettlement.

Eritrea has an estimated population of four million (of whom one million are refugees) and covers an area of 124,320 square kilometres. Its 1000-kilometre coastline stretches from Ras Kasar in the north to Bab el Mandab at the southern tip of the Red Sea. Eritrea is a microcosm of peoples and cultures of Hamitic, Cushitic and Nilotic origin. It

is made up of nine Islamic and Christian ethnic groups, each with its own language. Some 70 per cent of the people live in the countryside. Eritrea's physical environment consists of arid and semi-arid coastal plains, central plateau highlands, a northern massif and western lowlands, the Sudan plains. The vegetation is as varied as the physical environment and offers diverse natural resources for the population. With its mountain, coastal and river areas, savannah and desert scrub, the ecological and physical diversity of the area offers agricultural opportunities for growing various crops, including fruit and vegetables and a variety of livestock.

There are two main categories of land distribution in Eritrea. The first includes privately owned inherited land (*resti*) and communal land (*diesa*) belonging to village communities of extended families. This type of land tenure is most common in the Plateau of Kebesa region, but is also found in other montane regions where traditional crop farming is extensive. The second category is state land (*dominale*), which covers the most spacious and fertile lowland regions in the west, east and north-east and parts of the plateau. These areas were developed for concession agriculture during and after the Italian occupation, with the main emphasis on plantations, especially cotton, sesame and citrus fruit. Many pastoralists claim that these were traditionally dry-season grazing areas. But apart from the capital-intensive agriculture, these parts also seem to have attracted peasant groups from particular regions.

Given Eritrea's rather erratic rainfall, irrigated rather than rain-fed agriculture seems to have the greatest potential for increasing food production. During peacetime, 1952 to 1960, a total of 400,000 hectares (988,000 acres) of land was dependent on irrigation. Eritrea was then a leading exporter of fresh fruit from the Horn to the Middle East, including Sudan, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and Aden. Until 1970 Eritrea was the leading exporter of live animals and animal by-products, primarily to the Middle East (Panos Institute 1991). Much of the livestock originated from pastoralist areas. Nowadays the cross-border livestock trade with east Sudan continues on a reduced scale. During the Italian colonial period (1885–1941) Eritrea became a relatively industrialized and urbanized state. The post-war period witnessed a considerable industrial boom. By 1950 there was a strong trade-union movement and over 100,000 industrial workers. The industries, which relied on local raw materials, included textiles, food, glassware, breweries, fibre and paper. Soap, oil and tobacco were manufactured for the domestic and

international markets. Eritrea's mineral and marine resources are, however, still underexploited. Mineral finds include gold, copper, marble, petroleum, asbestos, manganese, titanium and nickel. Gold and copper were mined by the Italians. With about 1000 kilometres of coastline, Eritrea has a promising marine industry. Plants processing fish and other marine products thrived in peace time.

The past 30 years have seen severe degradation of the environment and the displacement of over half the civilian population. Degradation due to overgrazing and high population density (both human and livestock) in the highland regions of Eritrea and their peripheries was already in an advanced stage well before the war. FAO literature in the early 1960s clearly reinforces this view. Shortages of firewood and building materials were suffered, but not as desperately as today. At that time the survival strategy used by Eritrean peasants was to migrate to agricultural grazing land in less populated areas around the green belt known as Bahri and the western lowlands, particularly the Gash and Setit areas. There is now open conflict between ethnic groups in these areas over grazing and water resources.

Eritrea has experienced severe locust infestations. Vast areas of vegetation and crops have been devastated by hordes of locusts on several occasions during the last three decades. In the late 1960s the Eritrean government bought large quantities of grain from Sudan to make up for deficient harvests following locust infestations. Eritrea was rich in livestock, so such a transaction was possible with the Sudanese. Until the late 1960s the United Nations Desert Locust Control Organization (DLCO) had its headquarters in Asmara. This indicates how seriously the locust threat was taken by the UN. After the annexation of Eritrea, DLCO headquarters were moved to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, in a systematic move to dismantle institutions in Eritrea.

Degradation Caused by War

It is difficult to quantify the overall negative environmental impact of the war, but there is ample evidence of destruction. The clearing of forest reserves by troops, intense bombing raids of civilian targets, the scattering of land mines over wide areas and the concentration of people in and around security hamlets have all harmed an already fragile ecology and rural economy. Such actions make the war the single most important factor of degradation in Eritrea. The constant use of heavy weapons, including Migs carrying Napalm and defoliants, a policy of bush clearance of areas believed to be guerrilla hideouts and

the need for fuelwood by the Ethiopian troops have made the biggest visible impacts on reducing the available vegetation cover.

The Eritrean population and its army also primarily depended on the vegetation resources for fuelwood, building materials, grazing and cover from Ethiopian aircraft bombing suspected guerrilla hideouts. To the Ethiopians, green valleys meant guerrilla hideouts; for the Eritrean fighters they were camouflage. Forests have been destroyed, flora and fauna devastated, and many areas along the Red Sea over-fished by Soviet vessels (Panos Institute 1991).

The war has displaced an estimated half million people in Eritrea and created higher population concentrations in the Gash and Setit areas, which now contain communities from seven of the nine ethnic groups. Though the potential for inter-ethnic conflict in the area is ever present, cessation of the hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea has reduced some of the tension. After independence, many of the settlers are likely to return to their traditional home bases, but some of these may be too degraded to support any form of livelihood. Tensions over agricultural grazing and water resources are likely to continue in future.

Another factor is that the Ethiopian government lost control of most of rural Eritrea over two decades ago. Farmers have gone without the basic agricultural inputs and environmental conservation has been completely neglected. Any area outside the government's control (80-90 per cent is EPLF-controlled) was considered enemy territory and therefore exempt from any obligation to provide environmental rehabilitation. In other words, no environmental conservation was attempted for almost three decades. EPLF attempts to launch large-scale environmental rehabilitation programmes with NGO assistance were hindered by the changing war situation. And, after three decades of war, much of the Eritrean forest has been cleared. The 150,000-strong Ethiopian army which was stationed in Eritrea and concentrated in and around the major towns, seriously depleted Eritrea's forest and water resources. Apart from needing wood for building shelters and trenches, the army burnt many thousands of tonnes of firewood each year.

Villagers around Asmara report that Ethiopian soldiers were so desperate for fuelwood that they removed wooden farm implements and frames off houses for burning. Until 1976, the eastern flank of Asmara was covered with 200 hectares of thick eucalyptus forest called Bet Giorghis. The plantation was established by the Italians during 1930 and was in good condition in 1975. The Ethiopian army in and around Asmara was estimated at between 60,000 and 75,000 soldiers.

According to the Forestry Department in Asmara (a section of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture) the army did not interfere with the forest until after 1975. In 1976, when most of Eritrea was controlled by Eritrean fighters, the army felt it could better protect itself from rebel incursion if it opened up the forest and so it was at this point that it started to cut it down. It also needed firewood and the forest was the closest source. The Forestry Department was not consulted.

Security Hamlets

In the late 1960s the Ethiopian government introduced the idea of security hamlets. What began as a small project in western Eritrea then became a national security project throughout the country, involving the large-scale rounding up of traditionally scattered villagers to government designated areas. Many villages were then destroyed. The environmentally negative implications of these hamlets are numerous. A curfew operating between 6.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. inhibited free movement, and working time was reduced. Peasants could not return to traditional grazing and farmland. Consisting of 500 to 6000 households, these huge concentrations of people and livestock created intense competition for grazing, firewood and water, making the areas around the security hamlets amongst the most degraded in Eritrea (Berhe et al. 1989). The defending army around the security hamlets also required water and shelter, and burned dried dung and straw, which had once been valuable sources of fodder and fertilizer. Living in and around concentrated security hamlets as opposed to the more scattered traditional pattern of settlement effectively diminished the ability of rural society to be economically self-sufficient.

Fear and insecurity caused by the state of emergency, coupled with high government taxes on livestock, forced pastoralists in particular to divert their livestock trade to eastern Sudan, where it was sold more cheaply. Eritrean refugees also provided Sudan with cheap labour. Agro-pastoralists from the Hamsien plateau traditionally took advantage of winter rains (November–February) to move their livestock to the escarpment 140 kilometres to the east. They would harvest in February and return in time for planting during the summer rains in May. But in 1985 these farmers were moved to new security villages and had their movements restricted to a ten-kilometre radius.

In the western lowlands cattle raisers traditionally migrated between wet and dry season camps about 40 to 100 kilometres apart. In west Eritrea, non-milch cattle were traditionally taken south during the long

dry season (December to April) for grazing deep in Gondar province and south east Sudan. After 1978, however, the territory in which the wet season camp is located was under EPLF control, whereas that of the dry season camp was in the hands of the Ethiopian troops (Panos Institute 1991). In addition, air strikes forced many to give up their pastoralist activities and flee to refugee camps in Sudan, leaving their cattle behind.

Conclusion

Assuming that there will be peace, now that the conflict is over, there is scope for regional cooperation among war-torn countries in the region. There have always been trade links and cultural, socio-economic and historical ties between the various peoples of the Horn and one hopes that such ties will be revived and that the environmental crisis will be tackled as a regional problem.

Since the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s aid donors have become more concerned about environmental degradation. The risk of future violence in the Horn could be reduced if it were accepted that accelerated environmental degradation (and its consequent destabilization) contributed to conflict. All too often, states fail to recognize the link, preferring to suppress the conflict rather than deal with its causes. Conflict resolution must include tackling the problem of environmental degradation. If further bloodshed is to be avoided, government policies must give far greater priority to repairing the damaged environment and implementing more sustainable paths to development.

Recommendations

Water Resources

Within the Horn the Ethiopian highlands function as the main water reservoir for the whole region. All rivers with irrigation potential flow across national borders. The main states involved in cross-border water resource management of the Nile are Ethiopia (the main supplier), Egypt (the main consumer) and Sudan (through which most of the water passes and whose economy depends on it). But to other countries the waters of the Awash, flowing from Ethiopia to Djibouti, and the Shebelle and Juba rivers, which rise in Ethiopia and flow through southern Somalia, are equally important.

Ethiopia holds the key to any solution based on a cooperative regional approach. Having been ignored in unilateral decisions about the use of Nile waters, it nurses a historical grievance. But so far civil

unrest and lack of finances have frustrated its specific plans. Ethiopia needs to assess present and future needs. A point of departure for regional cooperation could be for all countries in the Horn, with assistance from a regional body and drawing on the expertise of countries within the region such as Egypt, to formulate their own national water plans. More trust would be developed between countries if future utilization needs could be identified and stated. River water is a key resource which should be developed for the region as a whole. It almost compels cooperation.

Priorities for regional cooperation in water use include:

1. The appointment of joint basin management authorities for cross-border rivers. These could be coordinated at a sub-basin national level (along the lines of the New Zealand water catchment authorities) with integrated soil and water conservation, and development plans.
2. Irrigation development in pastoral areas. In the past, irrigation schemes have tended to ignore the needs of pastoralists and have thus failed to acknowledge the large contribution to exports from the Horn made by livestock, hides and skins. Fodder crops, mixed farming, dairying and fattening opportunities should be included in planning the location and development of irrigation facilities.
3. National comprehensive master plans for ground-water management. Irrigation policy and strategy should be developed along the lines of the national water resource master plan (with assistance from WAPCOS, an Indian government agency).
4. Increased funding for the collection and dissemination of meteorological and hydrological data and analysis.
5. The restoration and expansion of trade links. The regional ports were bones of contention to the colonial powers. Conflicts erupted over Rotdat, Massawa and Assab, and various other ports were closed from time to time because of some conflict or other. Djibouti is at present relatively stable, but could become vulnerable if the French presence were lessened. Port closures have disrupted traditional trade routes and slowed down international trade in, for example, livestock. Feeding, watering and quarantine facilities should be developed around the ports and their hinterlands. Regional cooperation in shipping and in the marketing of regional products would also prove beneficial.
6. The ratification of existing agreements pertaining to the marine

environment and their extension to include all states in the Horn. Ethiopia was excluded from the UNEP's 1983 Regional Seas Programme and as a result Djibouti refused to sign for fear of alienating Ethiopia, on whose trade it depends.

7. Cooperation in controlling national waters in general and pollution in particular. This could be based around the Centre for the Control of Marine Pollution in Djibouti.
8. Joint declaration on the exploitation of the mineral resources of the Red Sea area. The mineral endowment of the region has not been properly surveyed, and intensified oil exploration may produce future problems.
9. Joint policy on conservation and sustainable maximization of income from coastal fisheries, protection and development agreements.
10. Strengthening of marine research facilities in the Horn.

Traditional Farmers

National and regional support for traditional rain-fed farming is a high priority if environmental and food security are to be achieved. Although the bulk of the subregion's food and foreign exchange comes from the produce of small farm households, their needs have been badly neglected, perhaps partly because they have been misunderstood. It is only possible to discover their specific needs and help them achieve their potential if the development agencies actually interact with the small farmers, including the many who are women. The interaction should be structured and facilitated by a *farming system* research approach – i.e. taking all aspects of the farm household and its activities into account.

A comprehensive programme should include:

1. Harmonizing the laws of different countries on regulating land use, protecting resources (range lands, forests, soil and water) and integrating land-use development.
2. Developing a common policy to fight desertification. This should involve exchanges of methods, training facilities and personnel and the systematic monitoring of vegetation.
3. Establishing joint grass, seed and tree nurseries. This would offer seed bank facilities and increase the availability of seed to the countries concerned.
4. Ensuring improvements in the infrastructure extend to the design

and management of labour-intensive public works (for example, feeder roads giving pastoralists and small farmers better access to their markets); and include drought prevention facilities (such as dams and irrigation channels) and afforestation programmes.

5. Encouraging increased consumption of and trade in locally produced crops.
6. Introducing land tenure reform and legislating for security of tenure.
7. Developing policies that lead to regional specialization.
8. Setting up food and environmental security programmes for all vulnerable groups, cooperating to reduce costs, and increasing access to remote border areas of Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia.
9. Engaging in ongoing consultation and joint policy action over refugees, and drawing up a Food Aid Charter to discourage the use of food aid as a political weapon.

Pastoralists

1. Stimulate trade by easing border restrictions and encouraging local commerce. State borders have often cut pastoralists off from their traditional markets and the various regulations and tariffs have made it uneconomical to trade.
2. Increase livestock production by improving the infrastructure both within border areas and between border and coastal areas.
3. Resolve the plight of pastoralists through interstate cooperation and firm political commitment. A regional agreement, or kind of pastoralists' charter, should be drawn up to define a special protected status for pastoralists in transit, especially through border areas.
4. Devise a common regional range-land development programme to maintain food security in nomadic areas. Nomadic groups require assistance to improve their system of production. Help is needed to incorporate existing knowledge of breeding and health care, to extend general services to pastoralists, to develop methods of conserving rainwater, to improve grain-storage facilities, to protect livestock prices in periods of drought and to give legislative backing to pastoralists' land and resource rights.
5. Diversify products. This could include forming dairy cooperatives and processing dairy products into goods with a longer shelf life, such as cheese. Milk marketing should be addressed more seriously and comprehensively. At present there is little information available on this, although it is an important part of the economy in

the Horn. An NGO-supported cheese making venture in Kordofan should be examined as a model.

6. Develop veterinary facilities and extension services. This is a high priority for restoring the pastoral sector. It could perhaps be achieved with support from the Gulf states, who are the prime importers of livestock from the Horn of Africa.
7. Strengthen pastoral associations, which have been seriously disturbed by drought and war, as well as health and education services to pastoral groups.
8. Make drought contingency plans for pastoral areas bordering national frontiers. There is a particular need to coordinate information gathering, planning and reaction in the event of a major drought, with measures taken across borders. This is particularly necessary where the same pastoralist group is found on both sides of the border and where movement across borders is a component of the pastoralist's own reaction. This situation is found on almost all the borders of the Horn.
9. Set up a regional research institution under the aegis of IGADD. This is needed to generate the knowledge required to plan for the rehabilitation and development of the pastoralist's habitat, to study pastoral society and to monitor migration (of livestock and humans) and animal pest breeding grounds.

Developing a Regional Strategy towards Environmental Security

Regional cooperation in the formulation of an environmental security policy should build upon existing resources within the region. Centres of excellence have rarely been able to develop due to the level of insecurity in the region. Somalia and Sudan have been particularly hit by an exodus of trained personnel. The regional body concerned with environmental security should seek to strengthen existing research institutions and concentrate its activities on the first level of cooperation. This entails data gathering, analysis and dissemination. Common policy formation is hindered by lack of base-line information, time series data and comparable data sets. An information programme is needed to improve the quality, availability, timing, processing and flow of data in the area of environmental security.

A centre of environmental data jointly staffed by member states should seek to produce a regional inventory of the resource base, as well as information on land and soil types, agro-ecological zones and

crop suitability, interregional trade, regional seed production and supply, hydrological data on water volume, quantity and sediment yield, meteorological data and pest breeding centres.

In that most of the countries of the Horn have no institution with a clear responsibility for the environment (it is invariably addressed as part of a broader mandate), institutional backing needs to be given to national organizations concerned with environmental stability. Environmental protection needs a broader perspective. For example, environmental impact assessments should be made for all major development works, and water resources and agriculture should be ecologically sustainable.

There is a need for coordinating national and international efforts to protect the environment and sustain natural resources. Existing national legislation (such as a general hunting ban in Djibouti) is rarely enforced. In Ethiopia, the ONCCP and IUCN have together been developing a national conservation strategy involving the use of under-utilized resources, sustainable development and the preservation of biological diversity.

Projects that address environmental degradation often fail to involve the local population. Imported technology may stand in the way of developing and testing technology appropriate for local ecological, social and economic conditions. Many projects operate unrealistic time spans and information and data from pre-existing projects have been difficult to obtain. The adoption of common strategic and policy guidelines would benefit from an enhanced availability of data.

Training involves economies of scale and is best carried out regionally. Cooperation could include establishing research and policy-making networks in key areas of environmental security. Centres of excellence offering regional courses could be developed. Cooperating to formulate a common policy on collective action towards environmental security will be particularly difficult. Policies will need to be harmonized, some short-term interests may have to be set aside for long-term gains and power may need to be delegated to a regional body.

Since the countries of the Horn have food and environmental security problems in common, I have suggested areas in which regional cooperation would be necessary in order to enhance national conservation and environmental security. A regional body could coordinate action and mobilize resources to finance and monitor intra-regional projects. From the experiences of both the CILSS and SADCC a

strategy based-strategy-based approach would probably work best. It would address long-term regional issues and projects as well as national or sub-regional infrastructures, such as irrigation and transport. Effective coordination can only be based on homogeneous development objectives and strategies: national priorities set by member states do not necessarily correspond to those at the regional level.

11. Neither Feast nor Famine: Prospects for Food Security

*Dessalegn Rahmato*¹

It has often been argued on the basis of inadequate evidence that Ethiopia's agricultural potential is so great that the country could easily become a net exporter of food and a regional agricultural power in its own right. In one of its recent publications the World Bank (1987a), which is often credited for its realism and cautious approach, repeated this same assertion and bemoaned the burgeoning gap between what it believed were the country's high prospects and the sad realities it now faced. The much-touted agricultural potential of the country is actually a myth, which ought to have been dispelled sometime in the late 1960s when the spectre of famine finally came to haunt policy makers and students of rural Ethiopia, and hunger and malnutrition began to be seen as abiding elements in peasant society. It is ironic that more emphasis was placed on the elusive agricultural wealth of the country, while greater suffering and more frequent food crises took a heavy toll on the rural population.

The real prospects of Ethiopia today are grim. Indeed, available evidence strongly suggests that the country is facing a crisis of survival brought on, among other things, by its inability to attain even a modest level of food security. This will have profound repercussions on

1. This chapter arose from field research in famine areas during 1986/7 when peasant survival strategies and reactions to extreme ecological crisis were observed. In 1988 some of these findings were presented to a conference in Oxford and, with one or two alterations, are reproduced in this chapter. In the meanwhile, the drought has abated, and in many parts of Ethiopia a good harvest has been brought in. But the weather is unpredictable and the ecological basis for agriculture is vulnerable in many parts of the country. A new drought can be anticipated in the not too distant future and, without proper preparation, could develop into an even more severe famine.

economic reproduction and social stability. By the year 2000, the country's population will have reached well over 67 million, yet only 15 per cent of the land area will be under cultivation, a figure only slightly higher than current estimates. In the same period, the loss of agricultural resources through environmental factors will have reduced the land available for crop production by up to 10 per cent, affecting the livelihood of perhaps up to one million rural producers and their families. Farm technology employed in rural production will remain unchanged, and the pool of agricultural knowledge available to the peasantry will have shrunk considerably.

This is not just a prognosis for the future, but a summary of what has been happening to agriculture in the past. The most distinctive feature of Ethiopian agriculture is and has been its progressive decline. This was brought about by a variety of factors, the most important of which were increasing demands for a surplus from the peasantry, technological stagnation of the peasant mode of production and ever-increasing pressure on rural resources. In the past, as now, social arrangements of production have invariably throttled any dynamic forces in rural society and prevented the rational utilization of the resources at hand. Any economic potential the country may have had has either been wasted or remained unrealized, and growing food scarcity and agricultural stagnation have become pervasive features of rural society. The striking aspect of the malaise of Ethiopian agriculture has been that the impoverishment of the rural producer has been accompanied by the impoverishment of the rural resources themselves.

The decline of Ethiopian agriculture may be attributed to recurrent natural disasters such as drought, floods, pest infestation, epidemics and animal disease. However, the depredations of the state, class exploitation and destructive agrarian policies have been of even greater significance. Additionally, the pernicious role played by the periodic destabilization of the peasantry through civil disorder, banditry and local insurgency cannot be over-emphasized. Both natural and social calamities have occurred in the north of the country more frequently than in the south, but their impact on food security and agricultural development has been far wider. The periodic migration of peasants from north to south, and from resource-poor to resource-rich areas, has been a common practice in the days before the revolution. This gave rise to an encroachment on resources that accelerated and generalized agricultural stagnation and blurred the differences between the ecological potential and farm specializations of different regions.

The data available on Ethiopian agriculture show that food insecurity and land scarcity were regarded as growing problems as far back as the 1950s. In the 1960s some government reports warned, though with inadequate emphasis, that in the years ahead food shortages would create serious difficulties in those regions in which the majority of people lived. A report prepared by the then Ministry of Planning and Development (1967a) estimated that only a few districts and sub-provinces in the country were food surplus areas, and that by contrast up to 60 per cent of the crop-producing regions in the country had a permanent food deficit. This finding was accepted by a number of agricultural specialists, including farm economists commissioned by USAID to assess the country's potential and provide expert advice in the latter part of the 1960s (SRI 1968, 1969), yet it did not influence public policy, nor were its implications seriously explored. In fact, for much of the 1960s most government reports continued to stress the country's vast untapped potential and played down the prospect of food scarcity. It should be noted that the famines of the 1950s and 1960s were so successfully covered up that few policy planners or other officials were aware that they had taken place (see Mesfin 1984). The imperial regime continued to starve peasant agriculture of capital investments, technical services and extension support throughout the three Five-Year Development Plans, except in the early 1970s when the so-called Minimum Package Programme (a sort of green revolution Ethiopian style) was launched in easily accessible parts of high potential areas to help improve the performance of peasant production.²

The crude indicators of agricultural performance and food consumption during this period tell a very sad story. There is no information available on output and productivity over an extended period so the state of rural production cannot be measured accurately, but assessments in a variety of official and semi-official documents clearly indicate that agricultural growth fell below the targets in each of the Plan periods, often below population growth, and that apart from some favoured areas that benefited from high-level extension services, productivity was either stagnant or growing at unsatisfactory rates (Ministry of Planning and Development 1967b; PCO 1973). Moreover, landlessness was a growing problem and household capital assets were unevenly distributed. A Ministry of Agriculture (1975) survey pub-

2. I am preparing a history of Ethiopian agriculture covering the period 1940 to 1974, which I hope to complete during 1994.

lished on the morrow of the military seizure of power found that nearly 30 per cent of farming households had no oxen at all. In food consumption and nutrition, the picture was even darker. The imperial government's estimate of up to 190 kilograms of per capita annual cereal consumption (which comes to about 2000 calories of daily energy intake) was strongly disputed by many technical experts (Eichberger 1968; Abraham 1972). Abraham was of the opinion that average annual food-grain consumption during the 1960s was 150 kilograms per person, which comes to less than the daily ration of 500 grammes set by the RRC for victims of hunger in 1973/4 and 1984/5. More recently, Watt (1988) has estimated that consumption was even lower and declining in the period 1966–75. Food imports in fact grew in importance in the 1960s and reached their highest level in the early 1970s. In the latter half of the 1980s, Ethiopia came to be one of the largest recipients of food-aid from Western countries.

The record of the military government that displaced the imperial regime in 1974 was even worse. While the peasantry welcomed its radical land reform of 1975 because, among other things, it relieved most rural producers of the burdens imposed by the landed classes, the rural policies implemented subsequently subverted the positive aspects of the reform and ushered in a period of insecurity and impoverishment for all the rural population. 'Socialist' agrarian policies such as cooperativization, villagization and resettlement, which were pursued with destructive vigour by party ideologues and callous functionaries, profoundly destabilized the peasantry, exacerbated its vulnerability and ruined what little chances the farming population had of improving its livelihood, income and nutrition (see Dessalegn 1987c for details). Just as the long neglect of the peasantry by the imperial regime culminated in the devastating famine of 1973/4, the destructive 'socialist' policies of the military government must be considered as contributing to the 1984/5 tragedy.

The 1980s was also a period of epidemics, which raged through the rural areas in several parts of the country. Cholera killed several thousand peasants in relief camps in north Wallo in 1985/6; meningitis swept through the densely populated areas of the Ensete zone in southern Ethiopia in 1988. The government covered up both epidemics and the medical authorities, local and expatriate, were forbidden to report them. The death toll in both cases would have been much higher had it not been for the energetic intervention of NGOs and international organizations, which eventually managed to convince the government

to request outside assistance. In this period some half a million peasants, mostly from Tigray, Wallo and north Shoa, were forcibly resettled in the western lowlands of the country and between 20,000 and 30,000 may have died in the process.

The tragedy of 1984/5 cannot be told in the space of a short chapter such as we have here, and a few remarks on it will have to suffice.³ While much of the country was in distress during the years beginning in 1978, it was Wallo, Tigray and north Shoa that were devastated the most in 1984 and 1985, with the worst mortality rate recorded in Wallo province. What is noteworthy about the recorded mortality figures is the high death rate among children under six, which often reached 16 to 20 per cent of total deaths. The figures on mortality and morbidity refer only to populations admitted to relief centres or those camped near such centres. Both in and outside the relief facilities, there was a disproportionately high female population, as much as two-thirds of the total in many centres. And yet the female death rate was considerably lower than the rate for males in all age groups. The high death rate in many of the relief camps, both in 1984 and 1985, must be attributed to disease rather than hunger *per se*. It is of course difficult to separate hunger and disease as the ultimate causes of death, since in a feeble and vulnerable condition (as famine victims are in), even a minor ailment can become a killer. Table 11.1 gives figures for crude deaths among famine victims in and outside relief centres in Korem in north Wallo in 1984 and 1985. At one time several hundred thousand peasants converged on the small town of Korem from the surrounding areas and some of the worst tragedies were witnessed during this period; it was also here that the first internationally run relief centres were established.

The extent to which the resource endowments of the country have been misused is shown by the fact that at present only a few areas in the country can feed themselves or produce a modest surplus. In the latter group are the provinces of Arssi, Gojjam and to a limited extent Wallaga, while in the former are Gondar and Shoa (see Dessalegn 1988). Under normal conditions, undisturbed by ecological stress or social disorder, more than 40 per cent of the rural population cannot feed themselves adequately and are exposed to hunger and malnutrition. But the most telling evidence of the country's agricultural exhaus-

3. I have dealt with this famine and peasant coping strategies in Dessalegn (1987c). This work has since been published by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies (Uppsala 1991).

tion remains in the periodic famines that have been ravaging it since the beginning of modern times (see famine chronology below).

Table 11.1: Mortality in Korem 1984/5

	<i>Relief Camps</i>	<i>Outside Camps</i>	<i>Total</i>
1984*	1071	1441	2512
1984/5**	4848	3137	7985
TOTAL	5919	4578	10497

Source: From the files of the Ministry of Health, Dessie, provided to the author in October 1986.

Note: *Period covers March–August 1984; **From September 1984 to August 1985.

The word ‘famine’ has now become synonymous with Ethiopia, just as it once was with India and China. The frequency of famine, its magnitude and its geographical extent has steadily increased over the last half century or so, and if this continues, as it most likely will, famine will cease to be a periodic breakdown in the cycle of food production and become instead an integral element of the agricultural seasons.

Famine in Recent History

Richard Pankhurst and Charles Wood have shown that the history of famine in Ethiopia goes back to the eighth or ninth centuries AD. What follows is a chronology of localized and large-scale famines from 1800 to the present. This is by no means complete as there is reason to believe that a number of localized famines, particularly in the southern regions and the periphery of the country have gone unrecorded. Every generation of peasants in northern Ethiopia has been exposed to a succession of famines in this period, and famine has occurred in one part of the country or another at least once every ten years.

Chronology of Famines in Ethiopia 1800 to Present

- 1800: Not much is known about this famine although both men and livestock are said to have died in large numbers (Wood 1977: 71).
- 1812–16: There are reports of localized famines in Tigray province

in 1812 and 1816 caused mostly by locusts and pest infestation (Pankhurst 1968: 220).

- 1814–18: There is widespread famine in Tigray and the adjoining areas to the north and east of the province. Several letters written by Ethiopians to their European friends in Rubenson's *Acta Aethiopica* speak of hunger and privation in 1814, 1815 and 1818. The immediate causes were locusts, smallpox epidemics and other diseases, and of course war and devastation. One letter written in February 1818 speaks of people being 'consumed' by war and famine (Rubenson 1987: documents 11, 14, 15 and 20).
- 1828/9: Serious famine in Shoa province (today's north Shoa) following crop failures and cattle disease. Hundreds of poor peasants are said to have died, and there was also great loss of livestock. Parts of Wallo may have also been affected. The famine was followed by a cholera epidemic which killed many more people (Pankhurst 1968: 216–17, 615).
- 1835–37: 'A severe famine', caused by drought, hit northern Shoa, and also Wallo, Tigray and Eritrea. The famine and the ensuing cholera epidemic caused widespread deaths. Pankhurst quotes the nineteenth-century German missionary, Krapf, as reporting that the population of Lasta and Wag was 'considerably thinned' as a result of the disaster. Widespread human and animal deaths also occurred in Eritrea (Pankhurst 1968: 217, 615–16).
- 1842: There is serious famine once more in Tigray. Not much detail is available but in central Tigray many households were suffering hunger and food grain was unavailable in the markets (Rubenson 1987: documents 55 and 57).
- 1865–67: The ravages of bandits, soldiers and the imperial state, accompanied by drought and outbreaks of cholera, caused widespread deaths and social dislocations in the Tigrigna-speaking areas of northern Ethiopia, both north and south of the Mereb river. The province of Begemdir is also said to have been hit hard by the famine. The death toll is probably very high but no reliable estimates are available. People in Akele Guzai and Agame *awraja*, which were thoroughly despoiled both by the famine and war, were reduced to eating locusts (Caulk 1984: 46–7).
- 1877: Once more war, pillage and destruction, coupled with failure of the rains, brought disaster to the northern parts of the country. The 'whole of the northeast down to the Tekezze and Maqdala,' says Caulk, 'was again gripped with famine.' The area covers the

highlands of Eritrea (including the Billen country), Tigray province and northwest Wallo. Again there are no estimates of deaths but this famine was at least as severe as the one that occurred eight years earlier. The following year there was widespread disease and, according to Caulk, the 'inhabitants of eastern Agame and Akele Guzai had little resistance as a result to an infection of fever in 1878. There were daily deaths' (Caulk 1984: 60–1).

- 1888–92: This has come to be known as the Great Famine of north-east Africa and has been dealt with extensively in many works. In our opinion this is the second most devastating famine in Ethiopian history, surpassed only by the famine of 1984/5. Pankhurst's estimate that the disaster may have wiped out one third of the country's population seems exaggerated. Most parts of the highlands and extensive areas in the southern regions were gripped by hunger, cattle diseases and epidemics for nearly half a decade. (For an eye-witness account see Aleqa Lemma's story in Mengistu Lemma 1959. See also Pankhurst 1985: Chapter 4; and Caulk 1984: 85–8.)
- 1913/14: Localized but extensive starvation in Tigray province, and food shortages in northern Wallo, caused mainly by regional wars, locusts and drought. The period up to the end of the decade was one of food shortages in northern Wallo and central Tigray (Pankhurst 1968: 220; Wood 1977; RRC 1979; McCann 1984).
- 1920/1: Small localized famines in the northern parts of the country which suffered poor harvests in these years mainly due to drought (Wood 1977; RRC 1979: 42).
- 1936/7: Localized famines in parts of Wallo caused by the destruction wrought by the Ethio-Italian war. An RRC document cites famine in some parts of Tigray and other areas in 1935, on the eve of the Italian occupation (Dessalegn 1987d; RRC 1979: 42).
- 1953: Drought and famine in Wallo and Tigray provinces. The extent of the damage is not known but famine was exacerbated by locust invasion. The disaster was localized to some *awraja* of the two provinces (Dessalegn 1987d; Wood 1977).
- 1957/8: A devastating famine, mainly confined to Tigray province but also affecting northern Wallo and parts of Eritrea. More than a 100,000 Tigray peasants are said to have fled their homes. According to Mesfin the affected population numbered about one million, and at least 100,000 lives (mostly in Tigray) may have been lost in the disaster. This famine was successfully covered up by the government. Shack mentions a localized famine in 1958 among the

Oromo living adjacent to the Gurage in south-central Shoa. The causes are given as too much rain and over-flooding (Mesfin 1984: 35–6; RRC 1979: 43–9; Shack 1966: 33–4).

- 1962–66: Many parts of the northeast suffered severe food shortages and famine in these years. Many parts of Wallo and Tigray were in the grip of famine in 1964–66 and many thousands of deaths were reported. A belated effort to provide relief by local authorities had only a limited impact. Mesfin calls this the ‘Wag Lasta Famine’, but according to several official sources the majority of the *awraja* of Wallo were in distress in these years. Similarly, Adua, Shire, Axum, Tembien and Raya Azebo *awraja* in Tigray were badly hit. Livestock losses in Tigray alone are put by the RRC at over 297,000. Peasants in Ambassel *awraja* in Wallo clearly remembered the famine when interviewed in 1986. According to them it occurred between 1962 and 1965. Guluma has written of a serious famine which killed many people in Maji and Gimira *awraja* of Kafa province in 1965/6. The causes were attributed to prolonged drought (Wallo Province Development Office 1968: 7ff; Mesfin 1984: 37–9; RRC 1979: 50; Dessalegn 1987d; Guluma 1986: 95–6).
- 1973/4: This was one of the most crippling famines to have occurred in the country and a good deal has been written about it. The whole of the northeast as well as eastern Harar province were seriously affected. Famine also spread to eastern Sidamo province bringing death and privation to the pastoralist and semi-pastoralist people of the region, and to eastern Gamo Gofa. The lowland areas of Bale were also badly hit. RRC documents put the death toll at 100,000 to 200,000. The causes were attributed in some areas to drought and pest infestation in others (Mesfin 1984; Shepherd 1975; RRC 1985; Hussein 1976; Dessalegn 1987c).
- 1977/8: Peasants interviewed in Wallo in 1986 identified this as a famine year. According to them it was localized and affected the lowland areas of the province. RRC documents, however, show that Wag, Lasta, Wadla Delanta and Wore Himenu, all highland *awraja*, were suffering severe food shortages in this year. About half a million people were said to be in need of food aid. The causes of the crop failures were pests, frost and inadequate or too much rain. An outbreak of ergotism occurred and several hundred peasants died as a result in Wag and Wadla Delanta. Food shortages were also reported in Tigray. There was sporadic violence in Tigray (Dessalegn 1987c; RRC 1978; RRC 1979).

- *1984/5*: This famine, which in some parts of the country persisted into 1986, must be considered the greatest tragedy rural Ethiopia has ever experienced. Only a few areas in the country were not in distress during these two years. What were normally famine-free areas in the south of the country (Wollaita, Kembata and Hadiya) were hit hard by drought and crop disease, and many deaths occurred. Some claim one million lives were lost (others half that number) as a direct result of the famine (King 1986 and Jansson 1987 respectively). My own estimate of the death toll is about 400,000, but if we include deaths that occurred through resettlement and in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, the figure may well exceed half a million. Northern Ethiopia as a whole was torn by civil conflict brought on by insurgency and counter-insurgency beginning in the early 1980s (earlier in the case of Eritrea). Nearly half a million peasants from the region left their homes and fled to the Sudan as a result of the fighting and the famine (see Dessalegn 1987d for references).
- *1987/8*: This food crisis was mainly confined to the northern part of the country (Eritrea, Tigray, Wallo and parts of Gondar). It was made worse by the widespread fighting, banditry and social disorder in the region.

The consequences of famine on agriculture and the peasantry are too well known to need recounting here. Apart from the large-scale loss of human life and farm animals, the destruction of property and the dislocation of families, famine also saps the energies of farming communities and leads to the exhaustion of natural and social resources. However, as famine has become an enduring element of rural society the peasantry has evolved a variety of coping strategies which, unrefined though they are, have enabled it to survive through disaster large or small. These survival techniques have become incorporated into all aspects of rural production and consist of a wealth of agricultural knowledge and economic practices.

Indigenous Famine Response

A peasant community does not just give up and wait for death when confronted with a natural disaster or food crisis. The threat of imminent danger in fact triggers a heightened awareness and a spate of defensive activity in rural communities. Everything is done to *anticipate, prepare for, withstand* and finally *withdraw from* the ambit of the crisis. These

four 'movements' make up the totality of peasant survival strategies. It is of course true that relief and emergency food aid were responsible for saving the lives of countless peasants in the famines of the last decade, but it is equally true that indigenous survival techniques and the collective efforts of the peasantry were instrumental in saving a far greater number of people from death by starvation.

Indigenous disaster survival here involves the adoption of emergency induced resource management measures, the effective use of natural resources, divestment of savings and disposal of assets, and greater and more efficient use of the market system. The elements of indigenous famine survival may be grouped into four sequential series of activities, namely austerity and reduced consumption, temporary migration, divestment and crisis migration. Assuming that the immediate cause of the food crisis was a failed harvest in the autumn season, peasant response will take the following form:

- austerity and reduced consumption (January to April);
- temporary migration (mostly in the spring);
- divestment (May to August); and
- crisis migration (August to October).

It is impossible to cover all elements of famine survival in a short chapter like this, and we shall have to content ourselves with a brief discussion of a few aspects of the subject.

Austerity with reduced consumption, the first and most frequent response of peasants in distress, forms part of the radical resource management strategy of peasant households. Radical resource management means deploying and utilizing all the resources of a household for the purposes of withstanding a crisis. What distinguishes this from resource management in normal circumstances is that a great deal of careful selection is involved, and a more complicated disposal technique is employed to maximize the value of available assets. An asset is any item that can be exchanged for cash or food within the bounds of community moral values and existing political structures.

Right from the first phase of famine survival a peasant household's resource management system is put to its severest test. This is because the needs of the family have to be carefully balanced against the available food resources, which have to be used carefully to make them last as long as possible. Resource management here also involves sharply altering the mix of food items normally consumed in the family, as well

as reducing their quantity and quality. The division of labour in the family remains distinct at this stage: while women are entrusted with the management of all immediately consumable food resources, men are responsible for managing other assets of the family, and for entering into reciprocal arrangements with other families for purposes of mutual support and exchange.

Household food management goes hand in hand with a more intensive exploitation of the resources of the surrounding environment. At each point in the famine cycle peasants attempt to supplement their diet with a selection of wild plants, roots, berries or wild game, and to acquire additional cash income by marketing a variety of bush or forest products.

The traditional environmental science of the peasantry includes an extensive stock of botanical knowledge, and the average peasant knows a great many of the wild plants, trees, and natural forest resources in his or her local community. While both men and women are equally knowledgeable about the natural vegetation of their environment, men specialize in plants which have medicinal and constructional value, and women in those that may be employed as food supplements and for decorative purposes. The botanical knowledge of peasants includes identifying the properties, growing periods and habitats, uses and other characteristics of the surrounding vegetation, each of which is distinguished by its individual local name.

One of the most important elements of indigenous survival is the rural market system. Markets play an important role in peasant economy and social life. They are the means by which a peasant household balances the family's basic needs. The rural market system is an intricate one, and the average peasant will have several markets to choose from and may periodically travel between 10 and 15 kilometres to attend the market of his or her choice.

Peasants also attend markets to meet relatives and friends, exchange information, discuss exchange arrangements with other peasants, make social deals and to have a bit of entertainment. Peasants as a rule do not have access to the media, and information on economic, social and political matters is disseminated in rural areas through the market system. Such information is important for every peasant family. A peasant household's resource management decisions may be seriously affected if, for example, a disease is spreading in one neighbouring community, if there is civil conflict in another, or if crop conditions in a third are expected to be bad.

Markets vary in several ways – in size, in the kind of buyers and sellers they attract, and in the range of products that are marketed. There are two other important factors that make the rural market system far more complicated than it appears. First, in most cases each market in each category has some small attraction to offer the visitor, and for this and other related reasons many peasants do not depend on one market but attend two or more markets regularly. As a result of its physical location, the favoured agricultural products of the people nearby, and the sideline and non-agricultural specializations of the area, a market may be noted for certain products or classes of products. This attracts peasants or traders seeking these particular products.

The second factor has to do with what may be called food complementarity. Food and other agricultural products are often traded from surplus to deficit areas. There are, for example, a number of areas in Wallo where there is often a surplus, and food moves from these to the deficit areas. However, within smaller districts, there are areas that might have a food surplus in one year and a deficit in another. Here the direction of food exchange is not always the same and will vary from season to season. Furthermore, an area may have a surplus in one or two crops and a deficit in the others. So there will be a two-way food flow as peasants exchange what they have for what they need.

But food complementarity is made more complex by the fact that a peasant grows only a limited variety of crops each year. Limits are imposed by small family plots and by the specific ecology in which the household is situated. The market allows peasants who need one or more food crops or who are placed in different ecologies to dispose of their surpluses and to make up their deficits. For example, *degga* peasants may travel to a market with their barley, which they sell and with the proceeds of which they purchase sorghum or *noug* (niger seed), both of which they need but do not grow. The exchange is carried out at local markets, often among the peasants themselves. This involves travelling to different markets in different areas. At times, however, it may be mediated through the rural trader who brings the products of one zone to the markets of another.

In brief, peasants routinely monitor the markets in their localities to determine the movement of prices and of marketed products. In distress conditions they pay greater attention to the market and make greater use of it. Indeed, under such circumstances their market horizons expand considerably. They become interested in faraway markets as well as their own, which they visit if there are benefits to be gained.

The system of divestment adopted by peasants during famines varies from family to family, but there is one thing they all have in common – the process is always selective and graduated. The divestment plans of peasant households, however, will be determined or significantly influenced by the following: the wealth of assets the household has at its disposal; the specific needs and composition of the peasant family; the special contractual or verbal arrangements a household has with other households for the common use of assets, especially after a famine; family, kinship or religious ties with households in stress-free areas and how much assistance can be expected from them; and the demands of the market and behaviour of prices.

One of the most important assets marketed by peasants as part of their survival strategies is livestock. Strategic intervention in this area by government or relief agencies could serve as an important response to famine. A brief look at the flow of livestock in and out of Wallo during and after the famine of 1984/5 may be instructive (see Dessalegn 1987c).

In the famine years under discussion the amount of livestock marketed in Wallo was exceptionally high. The most important buyers were large-scale livestock merchants, peasant traders and individual peasants; on a much smaller scale urban businessmen and speculators were also involved. Though quite a lot remained in the province, most of the marketed cattle and small stock left Wallo for markets elsewhere. Some went to the slaughter houses of major cities, especially Addis Ababa and Asmara. Since the urban demand for meat is fairly inelastic, very little excess livestock was absorbed in this way. Some Wallo cattle was sent for export through Assab and Massawa, but since these can only handle a limited volume of livestock, the excess must have been modest.

I suspect that a large percentage of the excess livestock marketed in Wallo (and the northeast in general) during 1984/5 was illegally exported to the neighbouring countries of Sudan and Djibouti. One government-sponsored study reports that the illegal export of animals to these countries, as well as to Somalia and Kenya, had been going on for some time and was estimated to involve a quarter of a million head of cattle during one year in the early 1980s (AACM 1984: 25–6). The ‘underground’ exporters of cattle to the Sudan were mostly merchants from Gondar, who bought their animals in western Wallo; some Gojjam merchants may also have been involved on a smaller scale. Illegal exports to Djibouti took place along the Bati–Assab road and here the

exporters may have been Wallo and Shoa merchants. What happened to the livestock that was driven out of the famine-affected zones of Wallo and ended up in the drought free areas of the province and adjoining regions?

There is sufficient evidence to show that a high percentage of it was returned to Wallo at the end of the famine. The same cattle routes were used to bring it back to the various feeder and area markets for sale to the peasants. In the period of recovery, peasant livestock traders and individual peasants who had bought livestock during the drought at bargain prices brought it back to sell to the needy peasants at high prices. It is very difficult to determine accurately how many farm animals were returned to the post-famine zone, but I estimate that up to one-third of the livestock lost to the peasantry of Wallo through distress sales returned in the early phase of recovery and was marketed there. At the time of my fieldwork in Wallo in the autumn of 1986, the reverse flow of cattle and small stock was still going on, indicating that the final figure may be even higher than my estimate.

A good number of peasants in several parts of Wallo who had lost their draught animals during the crisis said they were able to buy oxen at the end of the famine. Thus peasants were not 'deprived' of access to livestock at the end of the crisis thanks to the rural market system in general and the rural peasant trader in particular. This individual provided an important service to the peasantry in distress, first by buying farm animals and taking them out of the famine zones (and saving them from death) and second by bringing them back to sell to peasants who needed them in the period of post-famine recovery.

It is interesting that this simple but effective measure of buying up livestock from the peasantry in times of food crisis, taking it out of the famine zone for the duration and bringing it back to sell to the peasantry concerned at the end of the crisis – a technique the average peasant entrepreneur has employed for generations – has never been thought of as a famine response strategy by either the local or the national government.

Prospects for Food Security

All the evidence suggests that the scourge of famine will continue to haunt the country for many years to come, and that it is incumbent upon government and concerned authorities to give the fight against hunger the highest priority. At the same time, a realistic assessment of the state of agriculture and the resource endowments currently available

shows that even with the most intelligent and flexible policies the country can only attain a modest level of food security in the years ahead, at best enough food security to keep famine at bay and to improve the nutritional status of the peasantry. Anything more than that is unrealizable, if not utopian.

The most determined effort to solve the problem of food security will have limited results unless the experiences and lessons of the past are carefully examined, and the peasantry itself becomes the key element in a new, flexible and dynamic anti-famine strategy. The indigenous knowledge among peasants of disaster survival and agricultural production is a valuable asset that should be given the credit it deserves and be incorporated into all rural development plans and strategies. Rural policies in this country, as in other African countries, have either ignored valued rural practices or gone against peasant experience. State bureaucrats and development agents often assume that peasant expertise acquired over years of hard practice and experience is irrelevant to the development effort. This is one main reason why development policy has had such a poor record in Ethiopia.

If a rural development strategy is to be sustainable, if it is to allow the peasantry to maintain a tolerable level of production and income in the face of environmental crisis and social stress, it must include well thought out plans to maintain a food reserve capability and a system to preserve livestock along the lines discussed above. It must also promote incentive pricing mechanisms and credit services, and encourage the peasantry to participate in effective environmental conservation programmes.

Other policy measures that may promote food security include a change in outlook on the part of government and rural development agencies on the issue of poverty and poverty alleviation. It is obvious that the chief obstacles to food security and agricultural growth in the rural areas have to do with insufficiency of holdings, low disposable income and low consumption – in a word, poverty and destitution. One way of alleviating acute poverty is to designate a poverty line and to allow individual peasant households living below that line to be relieved of all taxes, dues and other similar obligations. With the poor state of information on income and consumption it may be difficult to base the line on liquid assets or annual income. However, one could use land holdings as an alternative criterion for this purpose. Thus, for example, a family of five with half a hectare of land in a high-density cereal zone, or one hectare in a low-density cereal zone, could be

deemed to subsist below the poverty line and be exempted from all extraneous obligations.

Related to this is another measure worth consideration, namely the designation of certain areas as food emergency zones. They would thereby, by law, become the beneficiaries of a variety of assistance programmes, including tax relief. A few select areas or regions, including the lowlands of Tigray province and eastern Wallo, should be designated as permanent food emergency zones and offered the same benefits on a long term basis.

If we wish to beat famine we must place the peasant experience at the centre of all policy deliberations. Any programme that treats the peasant as a passive rather than an active participant will have little chance of success.

12. Local Democracy and Central Control

Siegfried Pausewang

For many Ethiopians the period from 1977 to 1991 was a nightmare of mounting brutality and personal and material restrictions. These were years they instinctively want to forget. Nobody of sober mind would wish to repeat the 15-year experiment in which the state tried, in the name of 'socialism', to control every village and every human activity.

Yet knowledge of the experience could be useful to decisions being made today. It is therefore important to remember the revolutionary period of 1974 to 1977, despite the temptation to erase the last years of Mengistu's government from one's consciousness. The increasing brutality may at least partly be understood as the regime's reaction to being unable to break the passive resistance of the peasants.

The land reform of 1975 released the peasants from an increasingly repressive and exploitative landlord class. In some areas, notably Sidamo and Arsi, the peasants had become impatient with the military government for holding back their liberation, and freed themselves even before the land reform law came into force. The conflict between the peasants' desire to decide their own affairs in their local communities and the military's attempt to establish control over the country, its people and its resources was probably the most critical political issue of the Mengistu period. Throughout his period in office the peasants fought a losing battle. They became increasingly disillusioned, withdrawing their loyalties from the Ethiopian state and retreating from politics and the marketplace.

Over the years this conflict has been interpreted from a number of different angles. It has been seen as a question of resource appropriation (Eshetu 1986a) and distribution (Fantu 1989), in terms of the confrontation between centre and periphery (Payer 1974), peasant and the military (Brüne 1986), or simply as marginalization (Fantu 1989). It has

also been seen as a conflict between local democracy and state control (Pausewang 1988), as a struggle between peasants and the state (Brüne 1988 and 1990) or between peasants and urban classes (Taye 1989). These views need not be contradictory; they overlap and supplement one another.

Since Mengistu's fall, some new questions have arisen. Experience has now demonstrated that a strong state cannot resolve inner contradictions. Events outside the country, the political climate in the world, also impose new demands on Ethiopian politics. Abuses in the past have aroused international concern for human rights. The new government has come under strong pressure to guarantee human rights and to introduce democracy. With the collapse of the socialist bloc and the debt crisis has come strong international pressure to yield to structural adjustment and to ride with the international tide of confidence in a liberal market economy. The issue of nationality has become a uniting force for resistance movements. When peasants became frustrated at being unable to defend the local autonomy they had gained for a short period in 1975, national resistance seemed their only alternative.

To understand how such concepts can be integrated into Ethiopian policies and how far they might go towards solving the conflicts the new government has inherited from Mengistu, it is worth while looking back at the period between 1974 and 1991.

The Experience of 1975

When Hayla-Sellase was deposed in 1974, the provisional military government knew that no new authority could win legitimacy in Ethiopia without resolving the questions of peasant exploitation and land distribution. The land reform of 1975 addressed these problems by abolishing all rents and 'contributions' to landlords and by making the peasants themselves responsible for the redistribution of land. Since no authority existed to administer a land reform centrally, peasants were given wide-reaching local autonomy and self administration through their peasant associations. The government sent thousands of students to the villages to help organize peasant associations. Many of these '*zemacha*' students were strong critics of central control and military rule who supported the peasants in any efforts to assume autonomy and form self-administered and independent local bodies.

In 1976, after four years in Europe, I returned to Ethiopia to study

the effects of the land reform.¹ I was very impressed by the amount of local democracy I saw, by the high level of peasant consciousness, by the independence and efficiency of the local peasant associations, and by the peasants' enthusiasm and initiative for development in the parts of the country in which the land reform had by then been implemented. It had been done by the peasants themselves, to some degree helped by *zemacha* students, but substantially through their own efforts and without material inputs from the government. Clearly this was not true of the whole country – there were wide local differences. In some areas, where the land reform had not even started, the peasants rallied behind the local nobility to defend their *rist* rights from a military revolt. There were also areas where the land reform got stuck and peasants did not know which way to turn. In other places the elected leaders acted in the same way as the landlords had done before, using their new positions to enrich themselves. Nevertheless, over substantial parts of the country one gained the impression that the land reform had opened a safety valve and released a wealth of energy and initiative. The peasants were showing a genuine commitment and dedication to their own development.

After this experience I think it is no longer possible to claim that peasants are incompetent and unable to take responsibility for local self-administration and development. They did it in 1976. For sure there were problems, but they did it.²

Problems were clearly visible and conflicts were bound to arise. Corruption and nepotism created new inequalities among peasants, made some of the newly formed peasant associations function badly and held

1. A report of my experiences during this study period and a discussion of the rural situation in 1976 are included as a substantial part of my book on the social history of land reform (Pausewang 1983).
2. To demonstrate the extent of the independence of peasant associations in their relations with the state authorities, I would like to record an experience I had in Wallaga in 1976. I had been living as a guest in the house of the chairman of a peasant association for a week, when my host paid a visit to the *woreda* centre. There he was asked by the *woreda* governor what the foreigner was doing at his house and whether he was writing any notes or reports. I was told by a reliable witness that the answer, in essence, was as follows: 'The foreigner is our guest. Whether he was writing or not I do not know. He has not given us any reason for suspicion and our guests are our own concern, not your business.' This answer was accepted by the governor, who invited me to an informal meeting when I came to the *woreda* a few days later, but without any attempt to question me or my visit (see also Pausewang 1983: 150–6).

back local democracy. Where newly elected leaders treated peasants in the same way as the landlords had done before, the land reform had no chance and there was clearly a need for intervention from above.

With so much local variation, it was inevitable that some areas would push ahead far beyond the provisions of the land reform law, while others would lag behind. There was substantial resistance to the reform in some of the northern areas.

In some of the southern provinces, peasants attacked landlords and traders. When tensions grew explosive, the police or military intervened to uphold the law against the peasants, who sometimes reacted by holding demonstrations in the towns to assert their independence. This happened, for example, in Yirga Ciaffe in early 1976. This occasion quickly turned into a rural-urban confrontation, with wild rumours of barbaric acts of peasant cruelty being bandied about. In fact the only casualties in the demonstration were two peasants killed by stones thrown by urban youths.³ Peasants started to view their situation as a rural-urban conflict, and even *zemacha* students, who had helped them organize themselves, were told to keep their hands off. Two of them told me in 1976 that peasants had intimidated them into leaving and would no longer accept their advice. As the peasants put it to *zemacha* students in Sidamo in the spring of 1976, 'You are also urbanized. You think like townspeople. We know best ourselves what is good for us. We don't need you meddling in our affairs.' (See also Pausewang 1983: 143.)

Townspeople started to suffer from severe food shortages. This was hardly surprising given that the peasants were now allowed to keep more food for themselves. In fact in the first year they were allowed to keep all their produce. Landlords had previously collected half the harvest and then sold a substantial part of it in the towns, thereby feeding the urban population. The urban poor, in particular, demanded cheap food and were therefore negatively affected by the land reform. When the nobility lost its financial base, low-paid service and casual workers were the first to lose their jobs. As a result, the government embarked on some public works programmes (employing manual labour to build roads) to supply at least some small incomes. On the

3. According to oral reports from the then Ministry of Land Reform in Sidamo in early 1976. Actually one informant claimed that an urban trader was attacked and wounded after having shot and killed a peasant. All the other oral reports, however, claimed that the peasants had behaved in a disciplined and restrained manner during these demonstrations in 1975/6.

other hand, now that they were allowed to keep all their harvest, peasants could afford to eat better. They were more often able to slaughter an animal for their own consumption and, we also observed, they could have more to drink. In effect, they could afford to relax a little.

With the conflict between rural and urban interests having become manifest, the state was forced to take steps to avoid urban starvation. In the short run it had to get food to the towns, and the military sometimes had to resort to confiscating grain from the very service cooperative stores the government had helped build to protect peasant interests.⁴ The peasants obviously enormously resented such acts. But what else could the government do?

In the longer run, it was necessary to stimulate more, not less, production and to make peasants sell food items. A marketing system to replace the food supplies the landed nobility no longer provided for the towns was needed, as was a cheap food supply for the urban poor. If the government was to succeed in providing an alternative livelihood to the growing group of poor and unemployed people in the towns, cheap food was a necessary condition.⁵

All state administration needs resources, and the greater the number of important tasks a government wants to tackle, the more new institutions and services it builds up: in short, the more ambitious a government programme, the greater the resources required. As demonstrated earlier (Eshetu 1986a), under present conditions in Ethiopia, agriculture is the only sector capable of providing the resources necessary for development.

State intervention was necessary and it would be naïve to demand or expect anything else. My conclusion in 1976 was that the success of the revolution would depend on this process (Pausewang 1983: 157–71). The degree to which peasants were able to maintain control over their own affairs and the amount of representation they could command in state affairs would be *the* decisive factors in restructuring Ethiopian

4. Such acts fuelled confrontations between peasants and urban people. I witnessed an incident in Wallaga in 1976 in which a governor who supported peasant attempts to withhold grain from the urban market (in anticipation of higher prices) was violently attacked by townspeople.
5. Everywhere in Africa and in other developing countries governments tend to pay too much attention to urban interests, both because they are more visible and because urban groups are better placed to apply political pressure. Cf. Dumont (1980 and 1982) with Chambers (1983).

society. Peasant influence in the state, to balance urban interests, was to be the key to a socialist transformation of society.

From 1977 to 1990

Between 1984 and 1986 I returned to Ethiopia five times as a consultant for FAO, working on a study carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and financed by FAO. The study was an attempt to investigate the participation of peasants in institutions, the working of peasant associations and their cooperation with government services. A survey in two *woreda*, Achefer in Gojjam and Shebadino in Sidamo, supplemented our intensive discussions with countless groups of peasants and individuals in the two areas. We tried to gain as full a picture as possible of the peasants' own perceptions of their situation – their complaints, their problems, but also their appreciation of their own achievements, their attitudes towards development and their commitment to work for future improvements. Details about findings will not be given here, as the report of the Achefer–Shebadino study is now available. It was released by the government only one month before Mengistu's fall, after four years of postponement, reminders and stalemate.⁶

My overall impression from my visits to the two *woreda* and from discussions with our field assistants was of a sharp contrast with the situation in 1976. Peasants felt controlled from above; they complained of their total loss of influence over their own local affairs. Their peasant associations had been turned into tools of the government and had lost their functions of nurturing local discussion and local action. Elections were decided by the officials who selected the candidates; the peasants merely endorsed them through their vote. Control committees, which were established to prevent local authority abuses, were using the administration's criteria to evaluate the performance of peasant leaders. In other words, were peasant chairmen efficient in collecting taxes, obeying orders and organizing peasants to carry out activities initiated from above? They did not value a chairman's skill in representing peasant interests and advancing local demands.

6. On 18 April 1981 I managed, after years of trying, to get the planning minister to sign a letter authorizing the Ministry of Agriculture to release the report of this FAO study. Within less than two weeks the report was officially submitted to FAO. It was duplicated and distributed as a CMI report and a limited number of copies had been sold through the Addis Ababa University bookshop. See Mulugeta (1987).

Chairmen of peasant associations often felt sandwiched between the demands of the peasants whom they wished to represent and those of the administration on whose approval they depended. There appeared in my sketchy generalization to be three types of peasant chairmen. First were those who genuinely felt themselves to be spokesmen for the peasants, but who got frustrated because they were given little chance to represent peasant interests rather than official demands. Second were those who were essentially political activists (often young people elected because they could read and write) and who had some political training but relatively little practical knowledge of agriculture. They would often feel qualified to make decisions on behalf of the peasants based on their own ideological commitments. And third were the opportunists who sought office because it offered influence and access to resources, and who acted according to their interpretation of the wishes of their superiors. I will not speculate about the distribution of the three types, only hint that conditions were more conducive to the third type than the first.

My impressions may not give an altogether neutral picture. Many of them may have been a reflection of the subjective feelings of peasants. Peasants always complain; complaint is, in a way, part of their strategy to survive in the face of urban interests encroaching upon them. But, then, this also shows that peasants do understand the urban classes as being their adversary, an adversary whom they often saw personified in state employees. In any case, there was an observable urban-rural gap. It was visible in terms of consumption and of distribution of resources; in terms of influence on decision making; and in terms of understanding.

To take the last point first: there was an observable communications gap, especially between central authorities and peasants. Many of the top people in ministries and in the political leadership really believed that there was widespread democratic discussion at grassroots level. They were convinced that the peasants had ample opportunity to voice their ideas and grievances, and genuinely thought that programmes were only implemented after the peasants had accepted them and if they wanted them implemented. They were of the understanding that local democracy and participation were practised in full. Yet, on talking to peasants one heard a different story.

The gap in understanding cannot be explained simply in terms of the views of different groups being coloured by their different experiences and interests. The differences were too deep and too systematic for that

to hold true. The phenomenon was observable everywhere, but most notably in a group of educated young people in the middle levels of administration.

They were recent recruits into the state administration, which had been expanding fast to cope with the huge demand the revolution had created throughout the country for skilled manpower to administer the new institution building. These young people came from the groups that had suffered most under the 'red terror' of 1977/8, when being young and educated was tantamount to being suspect. Many of them had either been in prison or gone into hiding and only survived this period by the skin of their teeth. Having experienced political activity as a danger to life, they learned to shy away from political responsibility; they did not want to take decisions; they preferred to ask their superiors what to do and to interpret as orders whatever suggestions came from above. This group acted as a filter between the peasants and the top level. A request from the top to introduce certain plans to the peasants for discussion and experiment was easily (perhaps unconsciously) translated into an order to make peasants accept the plans and execute them. They wanted to report quick success and implementation without problems or delays. They wanted to be efficient and brushed aside anything they thought could delay their success. Information from the village to the central authorities was sifted through and only expressions of peasant satisfaction, support, acceptance and well-being were reported. Complaints and critical ideas were filtered out (Pausewang 1986; Mulugeta 1987).

To summarize, between 1977 and 1985 the experiment in peasant self-determination and local democracy was abolished and the government re-established complete economic and political control. Administratively, peasant associations had become the executive organs of the state and were no longer the democratic organs of the peasants. The total economic burden on peasants was probably greater around 1985 than the pre-revolutionary levels (taxes, contributions, rents and other payments and services to the landlords being taken together).

An exact comparison is difficult to make, both because the rural population had grown, making average plots smaller, and because it is difficult to compare the burdens of artificially low prices, quota deliveries, villagization and forced military recruitment with those to which they had been subjected by the landlords. But it may be fairly safe to conclude that after 1985 the average peasant was worse off than before the revolution. Peasants were back to a harsher economic exploi-

tation and political domination than before the land reform experiment, and pressure constantly increased.

The Liberalization Experiment

On 5 March 1990 Mengistu unexpectedly announced a liberal economic reform inaugurating a 'mixed' planned and market economy. In the sphere of agriculture, the peasants were declared the legal owners of their crops, including any trees on their land, and their usufructuary rights to land were made hereditary. Grain market restrictions and quota deliveries were abolished. Cooperatives were given the right to dissolve themselves by a majority vote. Free market prices were introduced.

The period from early 1990 to the end of Mengistu's regime in May 1991 was characterized by economic liberalization, but not by more self-determination or democratic influence. For the peasants it ushered in a spell of legal insecurity. Peasant associations were considerably weakened and their leaders became reluctant to take decisions because they knew that further changes in the rural social order were bound to affect their influence and position. They felt desperately insecure about future support from the state, especially since there was no follow-up to the announcement and no further directives about its application from above. On the surface, there was no evidence of state interference in the villages, though the army's recruitment campaigns were becoming more repressive. For example, the peasant associations had to produce a certain number of recruits, and drastic (sometimes brutal) measures were taken to ensure that these quotas were enforced. Sometimes members of the executive committee were taken for military training when their associations failed to meet their quotas. These campaigns were highly unpopular. They antagonized the peasants, spread discontent and made the state and its representatives even more unpopular than they had been before.

Individual peasants hesitatingly started to assume their new rights, to test the strength of their new position. Some left the villagization sites, others prepared to return more clandestinely, while waiting. There was a palpable decline in the authority of the local administration and a general feeling of insecurity pervaded the villages as everyone waited to see what further changes would come. People were starting to consolidate and entrench their positions – the struggle for a new rural order was imminent.

At first the peasants welcomed the price liberalization and free

access to the market. They rejoiced at finally being allowed to sell their produce wherever they wished and at the best prices they could command. But they soon became aware of a new experience. Prices for their produce did rise considerably, but prices for the goods peasants have to buy rose much faster. A small price comparison in March 1991 (one year after the announcement of liberalization) in three rural markets in Shoa revealed that the terms of trade for peasants had deteriorated severely since they had gained access to the free market. While they could double their income from their grain, they had to pay three to five times the previous prices for a blanket or a plough (Pausewang 1992: 193).

In sum, during the year 1990/1 peasants got an initially welcomed economic liberalization, but could not exploit the new situation to achieve greater self-determination. Nor did the liberalization pay off in terms of better economic conditions. The difference from the years before was mainly felt in the political and social climate of insecurity and instability, which caused peasants to look for future options while exercising caution and restraint.

After Mengistu

As a result of the Mengistu regime's dismal record, attention from both abroad and within the country became focused on human rights in Ethiopia. It was almost inevitable then that one of the first steps of the new provisional government was a promise to respect human rights, thus confirming its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article One of the Charter. Several human rights' organizations were formed in Ethiopia – clearly a reflection of the growing public concern. The government has agreed to allow Amnesty International to monitor the situation in the country and appears quite intent on keeping its record straight with international opinion.

International and internal public opinion have virtually forced the government to commit itself to a programme of democratization. Though views may vary considerably over what, precisely, democratization should look like and lead to, the pressures to embrace internationally recognized standards of democratic rule are strong and the government can hardly avoid them even if it wished to do so.

A third trend, which is being imposed on the government from outside but which also has strong support, especially among the urban elite, is economic liberalization. Pressure from outside is especially harsh in this matter, for almost all chances of receiving overseas aid are

tied to an agreement with the World Bank on 'structural adjustment'. What these pressures will mean for the peasants, and how they will influence the question of local self-determination and central control, will have to be observed in practice. But experience in other parts of Africa indicates that structural adjustment, liberalization and market integration will mean new economic constraints, especially on the poorest sections of the rural and urban population.

Another concern to have emerged as a powerful force has been the issue of nationality. The peasants' experience of the Mengistu regime inevitably brought them closer to the national resistance movements, which were the only opposition accessible to them. Conversely, when the urban opposition was crushed in 1977/8, young intellectuals from the student movement and others in the towns who did not want to give up the struggle, had only one choice – to retreat to the rural areas. Hiding from Mengistu's secret police they tried to build up resistance in the villages. In the political practices of the Derg socialist ideology had become as detrimental to peasant interests as the old regime of Hayla-Sellase. The national issue emerged as the new uniting denominator. Once socialist peasant self-determination had been undermined and reversed by a socialist central state, the only alternative appeared to be in the hope that national self-determination would offer liberation from central state repression. To expect more influence and control over their situation from an independent nation state of the Oromo, Tigray, Afar or Sidamo was for many the last hope. Active resistance movements in Eritrea and later in Tigray had been conceived of as national liberation movements. The Eritrean issue had long since become a question of national liberation from the central Ethiopian state. And there were national resistance groups, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), ready to welcome the disillusioned socialists and to offer them a new political platform.

In 1974 the key to legitimacy for the new government lay in solving the *land question*. In 1991 no new government could hope to win legitimacy without solving the *nationality issue*. A solution was found in the charter which provided for a federal state, promising wide local and regional autonomy. A provisional government was formed from a coalition of the various national movements.

But rivalries continued over local representation of nationalities. The OLF claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the Oromo, just as the TPLF claimed to represent the Tigray and the EPLF the Eritreans. To have a broader base for its struggle against Mengistu, the

TPLF had founded the EPRDF coalition. It included political organizations of other nationalities, such as the OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization), which was formed largely of Oromo prisoners of war after negotiations with the OLF had failed. After victory, the TPLF used its strategic position to put its allies (the OPDO and various other PDOs) into positions of power at local and regional level. This spread the nationality conflict to the regions and rural areas, and turned into a struggle for local power and for the representation of nationalities, instead of opening the way for genuine local democratic institutions formed by the people themselves. Nationality movements fought with each other in the rural communities for influence at the centre.

The 1992 Elections

The regional elections were thus bound to fail in areas where a national movement with traditions in the resistance struggle was contesting a new PDO group. The EPRDF supported its allies by putting them into a position to control the interim local administration. EPRDF forces, present as national defence forces, backed up their local power. Instead of being a peaceful contest to decide who should represent the political will of the people, the run-up to the elections turned into a nightmare of mutual distrust, accusations, intimidations and even violent attempts to prevent opponents from running. In such a climate, the control of administrative power proved to be more important than popular support. Thus, the national resistance movements that were opposed to Mengistu, partners in the central government coalition with the EPRDF, found themselves pushed aside and deprived of an opportunity to mobilize popular support in the local and regional elections.⁷

The OLF's view of the elections was that the EPRDF was obsessed with maintaining central control and thereby perpetuating the domination of the southern peoples by northern control of state power. But the government saw the OLF as trying to make an exclusive claim to represent the Oromo people and refusing to allow any other political groups

7. I participated as an election observer, assigned to Dembi Dollo and surrounding areas (and, after the withdrawal of the OLF, on election day in Addis Ababa). I observed first hand the climate of mutual distrust and the use of administrative positions occupied by local minority groups (in Wal-laga especially the OPDO) to prevent the registration of candidates of their opponents, and to a lesser extent of voters who would be expected to vote for these.

to compete for support within the Oromo areas. The same pattern was repeated in Sidamo, Ogaden, the Omo Valley and any other areas in which PDO groups occupied local administrative positions.

While cooperating in the government, the different groups claiming to represent the same nationalities clashed in local confrontations. The groups represented in the EPRDF, the so-called PDO groups, were usually given positions of authority in the local administration, which they would use to their advantage by intimidating and often outrightly suppressing their opponents. The latter naturally felt embittered, for they had the longer tradition of local resistance and the backing of a considerable proportion of the population, as both sides well knew. All the more reason for local PDO leaders to feel the need to build up local support for their movements, using their positions to dish out favours to those who supported them.

In the run-up to the elections this led to an inflamed situation. Election commissions in the *kebele* were under local authority control, in other words, under the control of PDO groups. In the more remote areas, where these groups could not establish their control over the administration, the older national resistance movements prevailed. Local leaders often managed to keep their opponents out of the *kebele* election commissions. Election observers found very few *kebele* with both sides represented on the local election commission, whether in the areas where the OPDO controlled the administration or those where the OLF did. However, since the OLF only controlled areas where the OPDO had no influence, the worst confrontations occurred in areas in which a PDO group ruled because of its administrative position and the presence of EPRDF forces, but had no popular support.

This constellation allowed local leaders to use all kinds of dirty tricks to keep the other side from running effectively. Candidates were intimidated, tricked or arrested in an effort to prevent them registering their candidacy. Attempts were sometimes made to confine voter registration to areas in which the governing group expected support. In other places, mainly in rural areas, known supporters of opposition groups were frightened away from registering as voters. Logistical problems added to the lopsided distribution, for the shortage of election material hit mostly the remote areas in which PDO groups had little support anyway.

On voting day things appeared to run pretty smoothly. In fact, had the main opposition groups not withdrawn from the election, it might have seemed relatively fair. There were few incidents, few overt

problems. Election observers who merely attended the voting process and did not know Ethiopia beforehand might have concluded that a free and fair election had taken place. But the decisions had been made beforehand at the local level.

What can be learned from this experience for forthcoming elections? For the 1994 elections, a minimum condition for a fair election would be for the central authorities to ensure that the local officials are committed not to one of the contesting parties, but to the democratic process itself and the will of the people. And they should also ensure that the commissions at the *kebele* level are really neutral when it comes to registering candidates and voters. But how can that be achieved? There is no way of suppressing ethnic identity in Ethiopia at present. The government has to ensure that all nationalities are represented, yet also has to protect ethnic minorities and their rights. Offices cannot be allowed to be used as platforms for advancing particular group interests. Accountability in office is a basic condition for democracy – accountability to the public, the voters and to public control.

The challenge to future democracy does not seem to be a competition between nationality and nation building. A collective national identity within the borders of Ethiopia would hardly solve the problem. There is, no doubt, a collective Ethiopian identity, but it is at present overshadowed by ethnically defined nationality identities. These two, however, do not necessarily exclude each other. Rather, one should try to create more relaxed, more layered and more multiple identities. One can be a Muslim or a Christian for religious purposes, an Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, Afar, Nuer or Guji for social purposes, a supporter of the peasant association of Merhabete or Alle Oua in a local context, and of Wallaga or Menz or Gojjam in a regional one, an Ethiopian in larger political affairs, an African in others, and a member of an *edir* (neighbourhood burial association) when family festivals are to be celebrated, all at the same time and without one interfering with the other.

What Kind of Democracy?

Indeed, OLF control of the Oromo areas would not necessarily mean the victory of local democracy over central control as represented by the EPRDF. Although the OLF claims to represent this alternative, local democracy would still depend on how far the OLF would permit other political interests and groups to compete for influence and public support. And this would depend primarily on their ability to revive local decision-making institutions that were independent of state adminis-

trative decisions and nationality politics, and to replace the control from above with a flow of information and authority from below.

It would have been naïve to expect democracy to result from Western-style elections. In a social setting like that of rural Ethiopia, the frequency of elections, the number of votes, or the strict observance of electoral rules are not what determine whether or not an administration functions democratically. In local democracy, individual influence and the co-responsibility of all citizens for local decisions is what counts. People will accept that a local administration is democratically representing them if they feel they have some influence over its decisions. And they will accept the higher-level (district, region and state) decisions if they can be convinced that they have an influence over them and that it is worth their while to organize and send delegates to represent their interests.

For the past 15 years the peasants' only experience of the central state has been of repression and the forced appropriation of resources; they have no experience of being able to influence the state administration. Not even during the short period of local self-administration could the peasants claim to have actively influenced the government that gave them the land reform but was suspicious of their attempts to take it into their own hands. Older peasants who remember Hayla-Sellase's reign recall the landlords and their tight control over peasants in the name of Hayla-Sellase's highly centralized imperial state. This makes peasants support those nationalist movements that promise an alternative to strong state control.

As far as the peasants are concerned the central state along with its socialist ideology is wholly discredited, which is another reason why democratic hopes for more self-determination easily concentrate on nationality movements. This means, paradoxically, that reducing state control and interference by strengthening regional and local autonomy would help to reduce some of those forces that today strengthen nationalist movements opposing the central government. Democracy in Ethiopia depends on the decentralization of power and on the delegation of decisions to the lowest possible level.

Not all decisions can be made at the local level – the district, region and state also have a role to play in any administration. But only by delegating authority to the proper level (giving people the autonomy to decide local issues locally) and influencing decisions that need to be made at a higher level can the consciousness of common responsibility, so necessary if people are to feel a sense of loyalty toward their

political organs, be created. It has been argued that a regional administration organized around nationalities would weaken the central government. I would argue that there is bound to be a reduction in the central government's dominance over the lower tiers, but that this is both desirable and necessary in order to overcome the legacy of the Mengistu era. Ultimately it will strengthen rather than weaken the central government, which is rather vulnerable and weak as it is. Decentralization would go a long way towards defusing the explosive conflict between central power and the nationalist movements, giving to both an opportunity to compete in a multi-tier government system without reinforcing rivalries, mutual distrust and obstruction.

This does not mean replacing the central state with a number of smaller but equally centralized nation states; neither does it mean transferring state sovereignty to an international body, be it an East African federation or even a Pan-African one. Rather it means replacing the autonomous power of the state government with people's representation, not only in state organs, but at all levels of democratic government from the local to the supra-national. In a way, sovereignty will be split between the different levels. In any case, the national sovereignty of the state government is a remnant of the Napoleonic wars in Europe and is ripe for a discreet burial. The people (not the nation or the state and its authorities) ought to be considered the sovereign power in a democratic state. There is no reason why the state should be more sovereign than a local community, district or regional administration, or supra-regional federation; nor, for that matter, than a church congregation, peasant association, labour union or football club. All derive their authority (which is limited to a specific task) from the people they represent; and it is only valid for as long as they represent the will of their members. All these institutions should be controlled by their members and their leaders should be dismissed if they try to exceed their mandate and impose their own will over those whom they are elected to represent.

Nor is there any reason why the state should be allowed to reject 'interference from outside' in its 'internal affairs' if it is in fact violating the rights of its own people. By welcoming outside institutions like Amnesty International to monitor human rights in the country, the new Ethiopian government has in effect endorsed the principle that human rights should take precedence over national sovereignty. The next step is to welcome any support that strengthens the people and their institutions against any authority that might try to dominate them – be it

corrupt local leaders, nationalist movements trying to monopolize representation, or a state government wanting to reintroduce central control over all levels of decentralized decision making.

European and African Traditions of Democracy

The African concept of democracy is based, not on 'one man one vote', but on the individual's sense of belonging to a community. African tradition does not decide by a majority vote, but through a debate that aims at a consensus. Anthropologists have described the practice in many African societies whereby discussions go on and everybody gets a chance to speak until a solution emerges that benefits the community and with which everyone can go along.

Correspondingly, in the African legal tradition the community and not the individual is the subject of justice. A traditional court is concerned primarily with reconciliation and reintegration of the community, not with personal interests or individual justice. It tries to reintegrate a deviant into his society, to reconcile him with his adversaries, to reopen a door to unity and peace in the community.

This is fundamentally different from European-type discussions. In Europe it would be futile to seek solutions through continuous discussion: if interests clash, a compromise cannot be found through argument and debate. A decision can only be reached by the force of a majority or of economic power. It would be equally futile in Africa to decide a dispute by a majority vote which cannot relieve the feeling of hurt prestige among those who 'lost' the vote, nor the nagging grudge of those who suffer material damage.

This points to some inherent weakness in European democracy. Liberal concepts of democracy individualize decision making and dissolve responsibility. Following a liberal model of the market economy, it assumes that the interest of the community will be taken care of if every individual takes care of his or her own interests. Accordingly, one theory of democracy assumes that parties should 'sell' their programmes to the voters; the party that sells the best 'product', will win most voters (Schumpeter-Downs model). Between elections, held every four or five years, voters have neither influence nor responsibility: they have delegated it to their 'representatives', who will take care of their (individual) interests. There is no space in such a model of democracy for community responsibility which is so important in Africa.

Another weakness of European democracy to date is its standing aside from economic decisions. In the economic field, private

ownership rights precede democracy, and economic responsibility relates to the owner, not to the community. Again, there is little space for co-responsibility for the well-being of all members, which is fundamental in African traditions, to operate.

On the other hand, African traditions may be weak in protecting the rights of minorities. For centuries the Beta Israel (Falasha), artisans, and the Nuer and Anuak (Shankalla) were minorities accused of having the *buda* (evil eye). They were excluded from community membership and, accordingly, deprived of equal economic and democratic rights.

A synthesis integrating the positive sides of both traditions seems possible. This would result in a model of democratic governance in which decentralized individual decision making, with responsibility for the well-being of the community, was combined with democratic control of economic activities, with protection for the rights of minorities.

Ethiopian Democratic Traditions

While based on the same humanitarian principles, human rights, another cause for international concern, take on a different aspect in Ethiopia. European human rights' organizations are mainly concerned with freedom of speech and political opinions. They react when individuals are denied passports or imprisoned without proper legal procedures, or when property is confiscated without due compensation. To the large majority of poor peasants in Ethiopia's rural areas, other rights are of more immediate concern. They would wish for a right to life, to basic health care, to a minimum level of education. A right to life would entail a right to feed oneself through one's own work. For that, one needs access to land in a rural society where, except for the very few with education or social position, the only jobs are in cultivation. The community cannot feed its members, but it can give access to land for cultivation, which is the only way to get food.

For the Amhara, who had been agriculturalists for centuries, the guarantee of a right to life was a right to share in the community's land. This right, or *rist*, was tied up with sharing responsibility for the community. Pride in one's *rist* was not only an assertion of an inherited claim to land, as many foreign observers state (Hoben 1973), but of a basic right to membership in a community, including a share in the responsibility for the fair distribution of land. 'Fair' did not necessarily mean equal, but was established according to needs, which could differ depending on family size, social obligations, and military and political functions. A widow who had no oxen to plough would get help from

neighbours who could afford it, as part of their community obligations. In his own community, even a beggar would be entitled to a share to live on. There was no equality, but there was a basic security, which was built on common responsibility.⁸

Pride in *rist* is also expressed in the Amharic word *gebar*, which refers to the farmer's contribution to the community, his commitment to the well-being of all, as opposed to the English word 'farmer', or the German *bauer*, which refer to the activity of agricultural production. The English 'peasant', the French *paysan* and the Spanish *campesino*, indicate rural residence, while the Scandinavian *bonde* or *husbond* (a term living on in the English word 'husband') refers to the settler, the one who lives on the farm and is the head of its household.

The Oromo derive their traditions from the pastoralists, whose rights of participation were bound up with sharing responsibility for everybody's well-being. Their community functioned as one big household, almost like a family. The community was integrated by elaborate obligations to share food and other goods (*maarro*) and to participate in mutual aid. A system of age cycles, called *gada*, distributed work and responsibilities. One age group would take care of the cattle, the community's most important asset, while others would be responsible for organizing community activities, protecting peace, selecting grazing areas and coordinating the movement of cattle. Every individual had her or his place. Everyone had a right to life, food, shelter, health care and education within the community's resources. Everyone also had a responsibility to contribute a share, specified by the obligations of their specific *gada*, and to ensure that these rights were maintained for all.

During the 'scramble for Africa', the *gada* of the Oromo and the *rist* of the Amhara, as well as similar cultural practices of other national groups, became corrupted and disintegrated into ways of accommodating anarchic forms of individual self-interest. The vast resources required to carry out Menilek's policy of centralizing the Ethiopian empire were brought into the centre at the expense of local communities. The Oromo areas in the south were conquered to increase Menilek's power and the Oromo peasants' resources were used to pay for the weapons with which they were conquered. The Amhara peasants were

8. More detailed information on the *rist* system and on the social significance of *rist* as a principle of social control over resources and their distribution and use can be found in Pausewang et al. (1990: 38–48).

also forced to contribute to Menilek's centralization efforts. When their *gult* lords were given positions in Menilek's army or central administration, they left their villages but kept their privileges. They thus continued to collect their part of the peasants' harvest every year, but no longer performed their functions in the community, neither distributing their share in the village nor employing peasants to work on their farms or in their rich households. When a nobleman lived in the village he may have collected half the produce, but it at least remained in the community. Once he left, the village both lost these resources and had to finance social functions and services.

The effect was the same in both cases: pastoral and peasant communities alike became subjugated to a centralized political and economic structure. The interests of the centre were given priority over those of the local community, and the interests of export over those of home consumption. This destroyed indigenous systems of social security and communities were forced to conform to economic rules that did not accommodate the needs of collective responsibility.

With most of the resources produced being expropriated to finance the government's central court and expanding international trade, competition for remaining local economic resources was severely sharpened. The *rist* system degenerated into a cut-throat contest between everyone for more land, in which people's closest relatives became their most dangerous rivals because they owned the same claims to *rist* land. *Gada* either disintegrated into an order of social ranking of little practical consequence or disappeared totally.

It is thus no exaggeration to say that Ethiopia escaped colonialism by participating in it. Menilek's state in effect joined the ranks of the colonial powers to become the only African colonial power Europe hesitatingly recognized. The firearms Menilek used to conquer the south and later to repulse the Italian invasion came from Europe. The European powers accepted his claim because they understood that he offered them access to the resources they wanted. Once they had helped him build up his empire it was far cheaper to control the area by trading with him than by enforcing European military control over him.

Democracy Defined as Local Social Security

Ethiopian local societies lost the food and social security systems that had protected their basic rights. Once local communities are pulled into the international economic system, their only chance of being re-established is through international guarantees for minimum social rights. A

right to life, food and hence to work, which can only be guaranteed through access to land, is the first basic need. Above this, a right to basic health care and possibly basic education seems important.

Such rights can only be put into practice by the community, which should build on the revival of those traditional mutual-aid organizations that have survived in the rural areas or adjusted to urban conditions. These include *edir*, the important neighbourhood burial associations, *equb*, the savings exchange groups, *debo*, the village-based mutual help agreements, and *maarro*, the obligation to share among the Oromo. But the community will be unable to provide basic social security, health care and education if people are unaware of their entitlement to demand such services, or recognize that they have a right, in fact a responsibility, to insist on organizing them. They need backing from higher district and national authorities, which have to set standards, coordinate efforts, train local teachers, health workers, food security monitors and store keepers. And they require an international institution to guarantee to help communities unable to enforce their rights for want of resources or backing at the national level.

It was demonstrated many years ago that basic health and educational services could easily be financed on a worldwide basis at a fraction of what is currently spent on development aid (see Norbye 1970, 1972, 1974 and 1982; and Hopkins and Norbye 1978). However, attempting to organize a worldwide social-security system through a central authority would generate insurmountable financial, logistical and administrative problems. If instead the responsibility were placed in the community, where it belongs, it would be possible to revive traditional forms of democratic cooperation. The international authority could interfere where the local initiative stopped; it could finance the marginal resources needed to allow local initiatives to succeed. In other words, it could fill in the gaps. More important than international financial support, however, would be the moral pressure on governments to allow communities to keep the resources they need to revive and organize their indigenous social security systems and to back them up with national support.

Local Democracy in an International Context

In summary, the essence of democratic development is manifested not in the process of voting, but in the strength of people's rights and collective responsibilities. Democratic participation and responsibility can most easily be organized and experienced through local decisions.

Caring collectively for the social security needs of every community member is the most important manifestation of local co-responsibility. In defending each other's rights to life, work, food and health, people experience responsibility for one another. When decisions are made as near to the people as possible, at a local level, co-responsibility can be experienced most directly. If representation at the higher levels is to be controllable and legitimate it must be based on a functioning local democracy.

Ethiopian people have a rich tradition of co-responsibility, which is largely absent in European forms of representative electoral democracy. Traditionally, Ethiopia's local democratic institutions also had the authority to make economic decisions. This is another area in which European and American market-oriented electoral democracies are critically deficient. The principle of 'subsidiarity', which the European community is now (with much pain) trying to establish, has long been a part of African tradition, namely that decisions are taken as close as possible to the people concerned and at the lowest appropriate level.

13. Ethnic Factors in Post-Mengistu Ethiopia

Alexander Krylow¹

Ethnic and religious factors have played an important and sometimes decisive role in the history of modern Ethiopia. Military confrontations between the central government and rebels in Eritrea and Ogaden lasted for more than three decades spreading to further territories during Mengistu's rule. It may be argued that both in scale and ferocity, Ethiopia's domestic wars were unrivalled in the 1980s. Opposition during this period was diverse, the spectrum of political groups and separatist movements ranging from monarchist to Marxist. The growth of opposition in Ethiopia has been slow and often painful, involving changes in both the generation of political leaders and in the social basis of the movements. The complicated pattern of contacts and relations between various groups can be understood on the basis of specific ethnic and religious structures rooted in Ethiopia's historical development.

Since at least the time of Menilek, the Amhara have played a special role in determining the ethnic basis of the Ethiopian empire; their language has been given official status, and their religion and culture accorded an elite status.

Although the Amhara played a key role in consolidating the federal empire and the absolutist socialist state that succeeded it, they do not constitute a majority of the population, for there are in fact more

1. Alexander Krylow has been following various resistance movements in Ethiopia for a long time. In this chapter he presents his views of the problems Ethiopia now faces as a consequence of a resistance which was, for lack of other uniting factors, organized mainly along ethnic lines. His warning (written before the June 1992 elections) that ethnic conflicts could easily erupt if a democratic system tried to implement formal elections with competing parties organized along ethnic lines, has become even more serious after this first experience with democratic procedures. (The editors)

Oromo. However, like most peoples of southern Ethiopia, the Oromo are less united than the Amhara and Tigray both religiously and socially. The latter are cohesive mono-confessional people with a high degree of ethnic identification, whereas in the south the process of ethnic consolidation is impeded by wide tribal, regional and religious diversity.

Hayla-Sellase I tried to maintain the unity of the empire by ramifying the vassal-suzerain relationships that had been strengthened through the widespread practice of marrying members of the imperial family to local dignitaries. The country's ruling elite was made up of the Amhara nobility and the Amharized feudal and tribal leadership, who operated the empire's state bureaucratic ruling mechanism. Important elements of this mechanism were the Amharic language, Amhara culture and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Amharization (i.e. mastering Amharic, adopting an Amhara world outlook, culture and tradition, and being baptized into Christianity) was an indispensable precondition for success within the state structure for all non-Amhara peoples. It is worth highlighting, however, that the predominance of Amhara culture did not mean the predomination of the Amhara people as a whole – in fact the dominant ruling elite contained representatives of almost all the peoples of Ethiopia, while peasants in Amhara areas felt the growing repression of feudalistic structures almost as much as those in other regions.

Although he strengthened the unity of the feudal-bureaucratic ruling mechanism, during the several decades of his reign Hayla-Sellase I failed to establish any solid economic foundation for the political unity of the state. Industry was at an embryonic stage and modern communications had only just started to be formed. For this reason many distant regions, especially those with a high proportion of ethnic minorities, remained difficult to get to and had no reliable connection with the centre.

Strong disintegrative tendencies appeared in Ethiopia during the early 1950s when Eritrea was incorporated into the empire against the expressed wishes of the local population. Another area of instability was created through Somali tribes populating Ogaden. To a large extent this instability resulted from the unwillingness of local Muslim communities to accommodate themselves within a Christian state.

In September 1961, shortly before the formal abolition of the federation, supporters of Eritrean independence began to engage in armed resistance against the imperial government. During the following decades the Eritrean separatist movement evolved from narrow,

conservative, Islamic origins, amorphous in organization and ideology and based on traditional Muslim tribal groups, to become a centralized political mass movement. Having gained support from the Tigray Christians and Muslims, who formed the overwhelming majority of the Eritrean population, this movement reflected the various ethnic, religious and social interests of the Eritrean people. This is why, despite resistance to the idea of Eritrean independence from certain Eritrean minorities, such as the Afar and Kunama, the EPLF leadership managed first to oust its conservative Islamic rivals from the political stage and then to defeat the Mengistu regime's powerful military machine.

The Somali irredentist movement in Ogaden peaked during the 1970s and steadily declined after the defeat of Somali incursions. The complete anarchy and disintegration that engulfed Somalia during the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the few remaining Somali organizations in Ogaden rejecting irredentism and reorienting themselves towards Ethiopian political life. Somali and other Muslim organizations have but limited influence and play no important role on the greater Ethiopian stage. There is little doubt that once Eritrea is separated, the TPLF, together with subsidiary organizations formed under its aegis and represented within the EPRDF, such as the EPDM, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and EDORM, will become the key political force in modern Ethiopia.

The TPLF was established in 1975. In 1983, when Legesse Zenawi (who changed his name to Meles in honour of the revolutionary radical executed in 1975) became its chief ideologue, it started to move away from narrow Tigrean ideology and towards a state-wide (excluding Eritrea) orientation. Soon after this, at the third TPLF congress, when Meles Zenawi became the head of the front, the members of the leadership who supported a narrow Tigrean standpoint were removed from office.

Favourable conditions for achieving the EPRDF's main aim – to overthrow the totalitarian regime and accede to power – were created by rejecting Marxist slogans, by implementing moderate pragmatic policies in areas under its control, by encouraging close military and political ties with the TPLF and EPLF, and generally by being hostile towards Mengistu's policy of turning Ethiopia into a vast communist gulag.

The second most influential political force is the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which was formed in 1973 and which fought against the Derg in Wallaga and the southern provinces. Previously, the OLF's

position had been complicated by its disputes with other Oromo organizations (including the Islamic Front for the Liberation of the Oromo (IFLO) and the OPLP), but after Mengistu's fall a certain amount of co-ordination of action was achieved. There are many reasons to believe that Ethiopia's immediate future will be decided by the policies of the EPRDF and OLF and by their complicated interaction. Each of the two organizations has its strengths and weaknesses. The EPRDF has the greatest military potential and controls much of the disbanded government army's arms and equipment. The leader of the EPRDF has become head of the transitional government and it, along with affiliated or closely connected organizations, holds the majority of seats in the Council of Representatives. However, it does have some major disadvantages, of which the first is the composition of its force – the TPLF (it is characteristic that Meles Zenawi heads both these organizations) – which draws most of its support from the Tigray people of Tigray province and in modern Ethiopia there are only a few million Tigreans.

When Eritrea, half of whose population is Tigrean, is removed from consideration, the number of Tigray resident in Ethiopia will be halved, thus reducing their proportion of the total Ethiopian population. At the same time, EPRDF attempts to represent and articulate the interests of non-Tigrean people have met with an ambiguous and often hostile reaction from these same people, who fear 'Tigrean hegemony'. Even the Amhara, who are the most closely related culturally to the Tigray, share these fears, and not solely through political rivalry. The Amhara are very sensitive about Eritrean independence and the possibility of further state disintegration. They cherish the concept of the historical uniqueness of the Ethiopian empire and a substantial number of them would regard the possible splitting up of the state into several parts as a national catastrophe to be categorically rejected.

To be sure, there are many historical reasons for the threatened disintegration of Ethiopia, including the lack of a common market as an economic basis for unity (a growing grievance since the time of Menilek's conquests) and discrimination against minorities, first under Hayla-Sellase I and then under the Mengistu regime.

Discrimination has been accompanied by a policy of deliberately playing off one people against another. It includes such measures as massive deportation of people from the north to the southern and western areas of the country, which inevitably caused great resentment among the local population.

At the same time as the Amhara were fostering the ideology of an

indivisible greater Ethiopia, the TPLF and other oppositional organizations of ethnic minorities were portrayed as trying to break up the Ethiopian state. It is hardly surprising that substantial sections of the Amhara community look upon the TPLF with suspicion or hostility. No wonder the EPRP, almost exclusively an Amhara organization with between 3000 and 5000 fighters, not only rejected every attempt by the EPRDF to unite all opposition forces against the totalitarian regime, but even attacked EPRDF units. Moreover, in April 1991 EPRP forces in Gondar province united with the Derg forces to fight side by side against the EPRDF (*EPRDF News Bulletin* 1991: 6). After the fall of Mengistu in June 1991, the EPRP called upon ex-soldiers to join its ranks and tried to use one-nation slogans for its own purpose.

Although having enjoyed quite friendly relations with the EPLF in the past, the EPRP now proclaims that it will not allow the disintegration of the Ethiopian state and the separation of Eritrea to happen. According to foreign observers, this stand on the part of the EPRDF has helped to increase its popularity both in the Amhara provinces and in Addis Ababa.

It seems likely that, despite lacking a safe retreat and being denied supplies from a Sudanese government friendly towards the EPRDF, the EPRP will in time gain mass support and become a serious political rival to the EPRDF. The EPRP plays the key role in the COEDF and its position is shared by another member of the coalition, MEISON, a primarily Amhara-based organization that has played an important part in the history of modern Ethiopia.

At the same time another member of the COEDF, the EDU, has preferred to cooperate with the EPRDF, which can be seen as an important diplomatic success for the new leadership. This achievement does not, however, greatly alter the existing military-political balance of power on a national scale, for the EDU is without military forces and has only a limited influence.

Until the mid-1980s relations between the TPLF and OLF were friendly enough for the TPLF to help Oromo prisoners of war get to their OLF bases. Relations visibly worsened in the second half of the 1980s when the TPLF's new leadership tried to widen support for its organization by recruiting members from among the different peoples of Ethiopia, Oromo included. One way of achieving this goal was to create (under the aegis of the TPLF) new organizations to represent the interests of various peoples. The OPDO was one of them. It was reported in an Oromo journal that when the TPLF and EPDU came

together in January 1989 to form the EPRDF, the new organization immediately set out to gain recruits from Oromo conscripts forced into the *neftenya* army to create the OPDO in the summer of 1990 (*Qunnamtii* 1991: 19). From the OPDO's inception, the OLF and Oromo intellectuals abroad (most of whom were sympathetic with or linked to the OLF) stressed (*Oromo Commentary* 1991: 1) that it was not a truly independent political organization:

[Since the OPDO and EDORM] were formed out of prisoners of war, it is clear that the members of OPDO and EDORM do not represent a nationality, a class or even the Ethiopian military to which they once belonged. Some observers have pointed out that the motive behind the creation of two small organizations of prisoners of war is to claim for the TPLF and its supporters as many posts as possible in case a transitional government that includes other groups becomes an acceptable solution to the present crisis.

The extension of EPRDF control over Oromo territory during particularly offensive operations against the Ethiopian army in the Spring of 1991 induced a negative response from the OLF, which feared a 'new colonization' of Oromo land. The front looked upon the OPDO as a weapon of Abyssinian hegemony – Tigrean in this case. This led to sharp criticism of the organization as 'neo-Gobenas'. In its publications the EPRDF saw the OPDO's role as follows: 'The EPRDF is an alliance of various organizations, one of which is an Oromo organization fighting for self-determination of the Oromo people, the OPDO. The OPDO does not and cannot ask for permission from any organization, group or individual to work among its people.'

The EPRDF has made it clear to all concerned that all Oromo nationalist organizations, including those that call for the formation of an independent Oromia, are free to explain their views, organize supporters and recruit members by peaceful means in all the areas liberated by the EPRDF. Oromos in such areas were in 1991 freely discussing and debating such political issues as interested them.

'Anyone who cannot see the difference between the EPRDF and the *neftenyas*, anyone who cannot see the difference between the conquest of Oromo areas by Menilek and the liberation struggle of the EPRDF cannot be one who has the real interests and aspirations of the Oromo masses at heart,' stated the *EPRDF News Bulletin* on 22 May 1991. But

the TPLF did not initially force this position on the OLF and the Oromo population, preferring not to aggravate relations with them, and the EPRDF's armed forces did not penetrate Oromo areas too deeply.

The futility of a military confrontation with the EPRDF in the given situation was obvious to the OLF, which, unlike the EPRP, did not launch military actions against the new authorities, preferring to use legal forms of political activity to strengthen its position. It thus participated in the work of the Council of Representatives, where it held 12 out of a total of 81 seats (six were left unoccupied). Among the OLF's allies, the Islamic OLF held three seats, the Oromo Abo Liberation Movement one seat, as did the Oromo People's Liberation Front (OPLF). Member organizations of the EPRDF gained 32 seats, of which the OPDO had ten. The OLF thus participated in the founding of the transitional administration, although it was not particularly eager to be involved in the activities of the new central administration, preferring to concentrate its activities in Oromo areas.

The EPRDF's attempts to establish a political organization for the Afar resulted in similar tensions as those arising between the OLF and OPDO. As *Africa Confidential* (1991: 11) says, 'the relationship between the ALF and EPRDF has been uneasy, particularly since the EPRDF organized a seminar of the Afar Democratic Union in 1990, suggesting it was trying to build up an alternative to the ALF.' Furthermore, Afars are the very people whose future would be most directly affected by the separation of Eritrea. At the time of its inception the ALF's leader, Ali Mirah Anfere, declared that the front's goal would be to establish an independent Islamic state for the Afars. The boundaries of this state were to be decided on the basis of Afar ethnic habitation, including the Awash river basin and neighbouring territories, and the southern part of Eritrea including Assab. The reluctance of a substantial part of the Afar to accept an independent Eritrea is a result of their unwillingness to see their people divided by state boundaries. But by holding such a position they are likely to worsen their future relations with the EPLF and EPRDF.

Over the last few decades the Ethiopian government has tended to underestimate the importance and complexity of the ethnic contradictions so deeply rooted in its history. To be fair, such blindness is characteristic of the overwhelming majority of governments of multi-ethnic states in the world, and the new Ethiopian authorities are likely to make the same mistake. Many EPRDF publications repeat old declarations about the absence of any real contradictions between the

people of Ethiopia. They place the blame on external forces and the overweening ambition of personalities both within and without the state.

This trend is evident in an interview with Meles Zenawi, which was published in an Italian newspaper, *Mattina*, on 1 August 1991. That the new authorities intended to show that Ethiopia had benefited from the fall of Mengistu's regime (which it undoubtedly had) is understandable, but they also needed to show that they were able to grasp the complexity of the economic and ethno-political situation. However, from the proclamatory nature of the EPRDF's publications and some of Meles Zenawi's assertions in the above-mentioned interview, there were grounds for concern. In the light of historical experience, Ethiopia's included, it is difficult to envisage a situation in which practically all the separatists suddenly abandon their demands, especially after they have recognized the right of all people to elect their leaders freely and to have self-rule within the Ethiopian state (Eritrea excluded). It is more logical to assume that at least some of them will seize the opportunity to achieve their goals through engaging in legal political activity. There are obvious analogies with the policies of ECHAT and the OLF in the mid-1970s.

The fact that northern Ethiopia, with few natural resources, has been completely devastated by war, drought and other disasters will further influence the situation. Only at great expense and by reallocating resources can its condition be improved, which will compel the central government to redistribute resources at the expense of the comparatively prosperous southern provinces. Given previous records of inter-ethnic relations, the local populations are unlikely to respond favourably to such a redistribution. They would see it as a Tigrean government stripping the south of the country of resources to favour Tigray. This cannot but help strengthen separatist inclinations.

When ethnic separatist movements struggle for an independent state, they struggle not only against government forces but for the assimilation of local peoples; alternatively they try to force other ethnic groups out of their ethnic state. They therefore separate groups into migrants, colonists and so on. In Ethiopia they try to discredit them as *neftenyas*. Consequently, I do not think that this is a good time for predominantly Amhara elites in the south, for they will be the first victims in any confrontation between the Oromo and the new administration.

In the same interview, based on his experience of living among Amhara peasants, Meles Zenawi asserted that he did 'not see any

Amhara problem because, like the other peoples of Ethiopia, the Amhara will get full freedom.' The problem, however, is that if Ethiopia were turned into a confederation of free peoples, Amhara interests would inevitably be affected. Of course, Amhara here is taken to mean not only the Amhara provinces and local peasants, but also the Amhara who have settled elsewhere in Ethiopia since Menilek's conquest. There is no way of granting the various peoples their rights to self-rule without affecting the political and economic interests of the local Amhara and, consequently, aggravating inter-ethnic tensions. They would find themselves in the position of ethnic minorities in areas ruled by other peoples. Discontent on the part of such Amhara fuels the one-nation-oriented opposition and sets them against the new authorities.

The new administrative map of Ethiopia and the creation of administrative regions can achieve little in this conflict. They will have only a marginal influence on the political process, which depends on relations between different ethnic groups and their political representation.

Another problem arises over the local peoples of the south (such as the Gurage, Sidamo or Somali). The OLF also wants to create separate ethnic states for them, but deciding on the boundaries of these states would present insoluble difficulties. The southern populations are very mixed, with complicated patterns of residence, so whether they accept or reject the Oromo plans, or even try to resist Oromo domination, boundary problems are bound to create new conflicts. I have often told my Oromo students in Moscow (who are all members or supporters of the OLF) that the OLF is more likely to come to power in Addis Ababa as the capital of Ethiopia, than in Finfine as the capital of an independent Oromia.

However, the Oromia political slogan is important to the Oromo and the OLF, for it allows them to consolidate their various regional and religious groups into one Oromo nation. The slogan facilitates a union between the various Oromo organizations – apart from the OPDO, which is not an independent force. For a start it can unite the OLF and the IFLO.

I think that it will be even more difficult to unite the various Oromo groups than to win influence in the Addis Ababa government. Historically, the Oromo have never formed a single state, but were organized in much smaller societies of clans or villages. They founded many smaller states as their expansion penetrated the area of present-day Ethiopia. Today we can clearly distinguish four main groups of Oromo. First, the western Oromo, mainly in Wallaga, many of whom have been

Christianized by missionary churches, of which the Protestant Mekane Yesus Church is the strongest. The first leaders of the OLF and ideologues of the Oromia national movement came from among this group's relatively large number of well-educated youths. Second, the northern Oromo of Mecha-Tulama, modern Shoa and the area to the south of it, who are more integrated into Amhara culture than other Oromo groups. They are mostly Christians of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and speak Amharic as well as (if not better than) Oromifa. Third, the southern Oromo from places like Arsi and Borana. Some are Muslims, whereas others belong to traditional religions. They often have a semi-nomadic life style and are not incorporated into any larger regional or religious unit. Oromo students report that these groups support the OLF and, indeed, a majority may do so. Fourth, the eastern Oromo of Hararge, the Muslim urban population of Harar, Dire Dawa and other towns, and rural people in the areas around these towns and to the west of them. This group has traditional links with the Arab world and its local leaders have a strong Muslim orientation. Some of these clans, especially the Jara, are supporters of the IFLO.

As the most numerous people in Ethiopia, the Oromo have become the key political factor in the Horn. If they managed to unite they could become a force with which all other groups would have to reckon. But even if they disintegrated into different warring factions, they could still throw not only Ethiopia but the whole Horn of Africa into political unrest and turmoil.

The main task of the Oromo leaders of today is to unite the Christian and Muslim parts of the Oromo movement. If they achieve true unification, Oromia may indeed become a reality. But relations between Muslim and Christian Oromo groups within a future Oromia would present problems. However, I think it is more likely that the Oromo will succumb to the same processes of disintegration that seem to have touched other countries, regions and ethnic groups in the Horn. If this happens we can expect a very unstable region from Sudan to Somalia, including Djibouti. After all, these disintegrative tendencies are characteristic of many parts of the world at the end of the twentieth century.

At present Ethiopia is at a very low level of social and economic development. At the same time an intense process of ethnic consolidation can be observed. This explains why the population is more responsive to ethnic than to social or democratic slogans. Under such conditions one must take into account the traditional confrontational character of Ethiopian political life, in which compromise has played

little part. Even if this had not been the case, the imposition of a democratic social model with general elections, a multi-party system, and freedom of assembly and of the press would create serious complications if the electorate were mobilized along ethnic lines. The unfortunate consequences of struggles for the control of state power between political parties organized along ethnic lines are familiar from the history of many African states.

14. The Unquiet Countryside: The Collapse of 'Socialism' and Rural Agitation, 1990 and 1991

Dessalegn Rahmato

In this chapter I shall briefly consider the last days of the military government, and discuss the rural agitation which accompanied the collapse of 'socialism' and the Derg, and which brought to a close one of the most painful chapters in the agrarian history of modern Ethiopia. I shall be concerned with the 'movement' of 1990 which reversed agrarian socialism, and the disturbances of 1991 which marked the end of one government and the emergence of another. The circumstances surrounding the latter events await closer examination, and the factual evidence at the moment is woefully lacking; nevertheless, it is important to put on record as much of what we know at present as possible before the recollections of the events recede into oblivion and the Derg era itself is consigned to the dusty archives. The first part of the chapter is really a series of questions regarding the fall of the Derg regime; until some of the critical evidence on the subject is brought to light, a thorough and objective post-mortem will remain a difficult task. The second part attempts to examine the events in question, in particular those which occurred during the first three months of the new transitional government, a time when the old regime had collapsed and the new regime had not yet consolidated its power.¹ As my aim is to invite

1. Material for this study was collected over several visits to the rural areas, in particular Wallo (north-east Ethiopia), Wollaita and Gamo Gofa (south-central Ethiopia), and central Kafa (the Jimma and Buno-Bedele areas) south-west Ethiopia in 1990, 1991 and 1992. I had a chance to travel again after the first draft was completed. I had extensive interviews with MoA extension and cooperative agents, peasants and peasant leaders. I use the term *agitation* in the broad sense of *disquietude*, *disturbance* or *strong*

discussion of the last chapter of the history of the peasant and the Derg, I shall not examine the violent events associated with the ethnic policies of the post-Derg period. The harassment, expulsion and massacres of one ethnic group by another in several provinces beginning early in 1992, which were instigated by the 'ethnic parties', or were a by-product of ethnic policy, belong to the history of the new regime.

The collapse of 'military-socialism' and the Derg² in May 1991 came as a great relief to most Ethiopians. However one may regard its ideology and its economic reforms, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Derg was the bloodiest dictatorship in the modern history of the country. Moreover, while the political tradition of the country has always been despotic and authoritarian, and in this the Derg was faithful to past practices, what was distinctive about it was its attempt to construct a highly structured and tightly centralized social and political system. All through the 1980s the apparatus of the 'maximalist' state, and of maximal governance, was elaborately constructed, and for many years it was considered a counter-revolutionary offence, for example, for any person to profess a faith, hold a viewpoint, or even put on an attire different from that of the rulers. In this respect, the Derg was in the tradition of modern totalitarianism.

It is almost impossible at present to measure with any degree of accuracy the destructive consequences of the economic crisis that began with the seizure of power by the Derg, and grew in severity with the hardening of the revolution and the greater pursuit of a Stalinist ortho-

reaction. To avoid confusion I shall use the administrative division and names of provinces as they were in force up to 1986.³ Thus Kafa province is the previous name of the province with its capital in Jimma. Until it was devalued in September 1992, one Ethiopian birr was worth, at the official rate of exchange, US \$0.46.

2. I use the term 'socialism' and 'socialization' with reservation. Though the socialism of the Derg had many things in common with Soviet socialism, both in style and content the former was a caricature of the latter. To distinguish the Ethiopian model, I shall refer to it as *military-socialism*. I should note that though the Derg publicly dissolved itself in 1984, the government was formally referred to as 'The Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia' until 1987 when the 'Democratic Republic' was announced. So the term military-socialism is not an unfair designation. The scope of this chapter is limited in time to 1990 and 1991, and in subject matter to rural agitations occurring at this time. I should note in passing, however, that the ideology that replaced military-socialism, namely ethnicity or ethnic politics, is a cause for great concern among a wide spectrum of public opinion.

doxy in ideology and state policy. But we do know in broad terms that income levels and living standards fell drastically, unemployment grew by leaps and bounds, poverty was greatly intensified, and the availability of services and their quality deteriorated sharply. Conditions were further aggravated by environmental deterioration, population growth, food shortages, urban congestion, and growing corruption among public servants.

But it was rural society that bore the brunt of the tragedy and suffering, and agrarian socialism was the instrument by which this suffering was largely inflicted. While in the early years of the revolution rural policy had a populist flavour and was strongly supportive of smallholder production – a tendency that perhaps reflected the political conditions of the time and the diversity of views and interests within the Derg – it came to assume a rigid, doctrinaire and authoritarian character with the marginalization of the peasantry as a political force, the concentration of power in the hands of Colonel Mengistu and his faction, and the adoption of socialism as an alternative road to development. Agrarian socialism came to stand for rapid collectivization on the one hand, and a vigorous offensive against private peasant production on the other. Collectivization was promoted under a variety of conditions, including resettlement and villagization, and smallholder agriculture was eventually to be absorbed into the socialist sector: voluntarily if possible, forceably if not. The land reform of 1975, the great achievement and pride of the revolution, which, along with mass literacy, the Derg always singled out to remind the people of its commitment to the welfare of the masses, had been so thoroughly undermined by successive socialist programmes that by the latter part of the 1980s it had lost its meaning and came to be employed as a weapon against peasants for whose benefit it was originally designed. In the end, it was these hard-line policies that deeply alienated the peasantry and prepared the ground for the collapse of the Derg. It may be argued, and the available evidence is sufficiently persuasive, that military-socialism came to a humiliating end not so much through insurgency and military defeat as by its own self-destructive policies.

I have dealt with the consequences of agrarian socialism elsewhere and I shall not repeat the arguments here (Dessalegn 1993; see also essays in Pausewang et al. 1990); I shall instead briefly look at three developments which were a direct outcome of the destructive policies of the time. The first and most pernicious was peasant insecurity, which arose initially out of the failure of the land reform to promote rights of

individual ownership, and which was later reinforced by the socialization programmes planned or implemented in the countryside. In terms of property rights, the central innovation of the reform was the introduction of 'collective' ownership and individual usufruct, and while many peasants were not fully cognizant of the implications at the time, state, and later party, agents in the countryside operated on the assumption that land was in effect nationalized, and pursued collectivization, and subsequently villagization programmes vigorously and forcefully. Long-established and hallowed traditions regarding land, locality and settlement, and customary practices regarding land use and the environment, were declared invalid and irrelevant. It gradually dawned on the rural population, particularly when socialization programmes got under way, that by what seemed like a verbal sleight of hand, all peasants had been dispossessed and turned into tenants of the state. On the grounds that land now belonged to the state, state and party agents proceeded to redefine rights of possession, to relocate peasants at will, and to threaten the recalcitrant with eviction.

Peasants were evicted from their land and relocated to marginal areas to make way for cooperatives, state farms and other socialization programmes; they were collectivized against their will, or reduced to landlessness without warning and frequently within the space of a few days. The number of peasants who suffered relocation and marginalization, or became landless outright will never be accurately known, but it is estimated that more than 400,000 households (over 1.8 million people) suffered eviction or marginalization of one degree or another (Dessalegn 1993). Given the high rate of population growth in the 1960s and 1970s, and the consequent scarcity of land in the rural areas on the one hand, and the bleak off-farm employment opportunities which became even worse by the close of the 1970s on the other, tenure insecurity came to weigh heavily on peasants and to embitter their relations with the state. It may not be an exaggeration to say that by the latter part of the 1980s, many peasants looked back to what appeared to be the halcyon days of the old regime, and remembered with nostalgia the times of relative peace and security.

The second major consequence of agrarian socialism which contributed significantly to the growing discontent in the rural areas was peasant destabilization, specially following resettlement and villagization, two programmes that the Derg decided to embark upon hastily and massively in the second half of the 1980s. The scale of human displacement occasioned by the resettlement programme, which was

initiated as early as 1978 but assumed massive proportions in the emergency operations of 1984/5, is truly staggering: as many as 750,000 households, of which some 600,000 during 1984/5 alone, were moved from their places of origin and resettled elsewhere, often in areas of low agricultural potential and high health hazard. Out of this total of about 3.5 million people, some 6 to 8 per cent may have perished due to disease, malnutrition and food shortages (Dessalegn 1989). The settlement programme was plagued throughout by high rates of desertion, and the settler population was never stable (see also Pankhurst 1992). Similarly, the scale of destabilization caused by villagization was equally massive: up to three million people may have been involved in the programme, and in some provinces such as Hararge and Bale in eastern Ethiopia, the rural areas were almost totally villagized, often by force and intimidation. Peasant society was shattered as a consequence: families were torn apart, communities were dislocated, and property wantonly destroyed. Both programmes were resounding failures in the end, and in both cases the cost in human life and physical resources was immense. The destructive impact of peasant destabilization on agriculture, food production and the environment are too well known to require discussion here, but I should note in passing that in socio-psychological terms the shattering experience of destabilization brought new insights and perceptions to the peasantry, enabling peasants to penetrate and decode, as it were, the ideology of military socialism in a way they had not done before. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the sometimes veiled and sometimes open resistance of peasants to agrarian socialism started in the latter part of 1988, when both resettlement and villagization had almost literally bankrupted many rural communities.

Finally, the impoverishment of the peasantry. Military socialism took elaborate and fairly stringent measures to siphon off as much of the surplus (I use the word surplus with caution) as possible from the countryside, whereas its investment in agriculture and the rural economy in general remained inadequate throughout the 1980s. While agriculture's direct contribution to government revenue remained comparatively modest all through the post-revolution period, the rural economy was not a beneficiary but rather a net loser in terms of the general flow of resources. The peasant was burdened with numerous taxes, an unfavourable structure of prices, and by a variety of state exactions. I have estimated elsewhere that the average peasant in the south central part of the country gave up anything up to one-third of his annual disposable income in the form of taxes and the numerous

exactions that were a regular feature of land reform (Dessalegn 1992b). In addition to formal taxation, the peasant was subject to grain exactions by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), which played the role of a domestic grain merchant with the power to purchase, or rather requisition, grain from peasants at prices far below those it would have fetched on the open market. The peasant was also subject to numerous levies imposed for a wide variety of purposes such as famine relief and rehabilitation, national defence and literacy. Moreover, what further exacerbated rural poverty was the variety of prohibitions relating to economic activity that were imposed on rural communities as part of the process of socialization; these prohibitions had the effect of penalizing initiative and enterprising endeavour. In many areas, communities were only allowed to hold markets approved by the local authorities, and peasants were prohibited from attending the markets of their choice, all on the grounds that markets reinforced individualism and the capitalist instinct, or discouraged farm work and other productive activity. Peasants who engaged in trade or other forms of endeavour to supplement their income were condemned as petty-capitalists and threatened with punishment, and the inter-rural movement of goods and people was highly restricted for a greater part of the 1980s.

Agrarian socialism eventually came to be associated in peasant minds with the ideology of poverty – a determination on the part of the authorities to level every one in destitution. The image of the Derg was that of a grasping overlord with a voracious appetite for the resources of the poor and the lowly. If at first the ideology of poverty appeared to some of the more religious-oriented peasants as a return to piety and the ethical roots of tradition, it soon became apparent that the new ideology had not renounced status and social distinctions but only redefined them, and that poverty was for the masses only.

It is remarkable that military socialism which, until the establishment of the Ethiopian Serategnoch Party (ESP) in 1984, was not supported by a political organization in the rural areas, was able to reach every rural household in almost every corner of the country. Equally remarkable was the ability of the regime to mobilize peasants on a gigantic scale for a wide variety of purposes, including mass rallies, political indoctrination, or large-scale public works. All these achievements – and achievements they certainly were, although the Derg frequently used its power for ideological purposes which in the end became self-defeating – may be attributed to many factors: the highly promissory nature of socialist doctrine, the greater ability of the new authorities to

speak to the peasantry and the under-privileged in general, the effective role the broadcast media (especially radio) played in conveying political messages and legitimizing reform initiatives, and, after the second half of the 1980s, the work of the party activists. However, I strongly believe the greater credit should go to the rural organizations that came as part of the revolution and were reinforced in the process of agricultural socialization. In particular, the signal role of that humble body, the peasant association, cannot be over-emphasized.

Agrarian socialism is incomprehensible outside the framework of the rural institutions of the post-revolution period, in particular peasant associations (PAs), producers' cooperatives (PCs), and service cooperatives (SCs). As these institutions were also the chief target of peasant anger in 1990, and stood at the centre of the rural disturbances in 1991, a brief discussion of each is in order.

Rural Organizations in the 1980s

Until March 1990, when the mixed-economy reforms were announced, the above-named were the three active rural institutions. In the same period, there were three agencies which in one way or another exerted a strong influence on these organizations. These were the ESP, a highly

Table 14.1: Rural Organizations in Ethiopia 1988/9

<i>Organization</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Household Members Million</i>	<i>PAs</i>	<i>Farm Area Hectares</i>	<i>Assets Million Birr</i>
PAs	20455	5.7	—	—	—
PCs	3732	0.3	—	488400	90.0
SCs	4052	4.5	17785	—	154.7

Source: Various MoA publications 1987–89.

doctrinaire party which was established as the sole political organization in the country in 1984, and which in the rural areas came to be notorious for corruption and embezzlement; the administration at district level; and service-giving agencies of which the most important for our purposes is the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The presence of AMC, the state's main grain purchaser, was keenly felt by the peasantry as well as the institutions, but the agency did not intervene, as the above

three so frequently did, in the management of the organizations. Table 14.1 provides basic data on all three organizations. Peasant associations (PAs) were first set up during the initial phase of land reform which began in the second half of 1975. They were considered to be popular mass organizations representing the interests and aspirations of the rural population. The idea was initiated by the newly established military government, and the associations were organized first by students in the field, and later by government agents. PAs were organized not by individual choice but by residence. The rural areas were divided into *kebele* of roughly 800 hectares in size, each household within this area being eligible for membership. Initially, their main tasks were land allocation, conflict adjudication, and the protection of common resources.

PAs played a constructive role at the beginning; without them the land reform would not have been successfully implemented. One of their duties was to distribute land to members, and initially many of them carried out this complicated task rather well. Despite their many weaknesses (such as lack of organizational skill, poor record keeping and poor financial management), and their frequently high-handed practices, PAs were by and large accepted and even popular among a large segment of the rural population. In the early years, PAs were participatory or near-participatory institutions. The General Assembly, which was the final policy-making body and consisted of all members, was often well attended and there were frequently spirited debates over significant issues. Further, in principle, the organizations were autonomous bodies and had the power to carry on their day-to-day activities and to choose or dismiss their leaders without outside interference. In reality, however, outside interventions in their activities came to play a significant role from the very beginning. By the 1980s, the PA network covered the whole country (see Table 14.1). While, formally, membership was by consent, the disadvantages of not being a member were such that most peasants had no alternative but to join. Membership entailed paying a variety of annual fees which over the years came to be burdensome to peasants.

As the government's rural policies turned into hard-line Soviet-style socialism, PAs lost what little autonomy they had and became part of the machinery of the state. From the mid-1980s on, they were integrated into the structure of the government; they were designated as the last tier of the huge administrative apparatus that the government built up as part of its socialization drive. They became responsible for tax collection, law and order, and other aspects of local administration. In

effect, they ceased to be rural mass organizations and became instead an extension of the state. PAs were convenient structures to reach the peasantry, and to siphon off resources from the countryside. Government agents, in particular party activists, but also the local administration, manipulated the organizations for their own purposes. The election process, which even at the beginning was more in the nature of an experiment, was subverted; PA officials were frequently hand-picked, and the work of the organizations dictated from above.

At the beginning, emphasis was placed on political work: PAs mobilized peasants for political education, mass rallies and demonstrations. Later, however, they became fully and actively involved in implementing the rural policies of the government, many of which were unpopular and highly resented by the peasantry. PAs were responsible for ensuring that each household delivered its annual quota of grain to AMC, which paid for the grain at prices that were unrealistically low. The government's agricultural price control policy was also implemented by PAs which monitored rural markets and blocked the free movements of people and goods. The extra-tax exactions, known as voluntary contributions, which were imposed on all households after the mid-1970s, were collected by PAs. The organizations also took an active part in the resettlement programme; they were often responsible for selecting or preparing peasants to be transported to their destinations. Frequently, PA officials employed resettlement as a punitive measure, sending off those with whom they had personal grievances, or those whom they saw as rivals for land or power. Villagization, another unpopular programme, was implemented through the participation of PAs.

Military recruitment was yet another activity that aroused widespread anger among the rural population. In the late 1970s, the government raised a large militia force, most of it consisting of peasants, to defend itself against Somali invasion, and also to pursue the fight against insurgency in the north of the country. This militia force was recruited through the agency of the PAs. In the late 1980s, the government again turned to the countryside to beef up its military force, and once again PAs were convenient instruments for the purpose. Each *kebele* was assigned a quota of military recruits, and it was the duty of the PAs to deliver the men to the military authorities. In most cases, PAs simply rounded up young peasants and handed them over to the officials concerned. Many households, particularly elderly or women-headed families, suddenly found themselves deprived of their

main breadwinner. Poor families were hurt the most because it was mainly the sons of the poor who were herded into the war machine.

In short, PAs became an extension of the state, and often acted as petty kingdoms. What started out as a populist, pro-peasant institution turned out at the end as a force used against them. Resentment against PAs was near universal during the latter years of the military regime, and was occasionally expressed in the form of non-compliance and dissociation from the organizations.

Producers' Cooperatives

Producers' cooperatives (PCs) became an important element of the government's agricultural socialization drive in 1979, when a formal directive defining their structure, tasks and responsibilities was issued. The government was eager to prove that producers' cooperatives were viable and would pave the way for rapid rural development. The ten-year plan drafted in 1984 gave great significance to these enterprises: they were expected to spearhead agricultural progress, and to be the chief source of food grain by the end of the plan period. There was thus a concerted effort to accelerate the pace of cooperativization, despite the strong reluctance of the peasantry. However, less than 10 per cent of the producers' cooperatives in the country had fulfilled the necessary requirements and acquired legal recognition by the end of the 1980s. Contrary to the expectations of the authorities, cooperativization did not proceed as rapidly as planned. In the same period, less than 7 per cent of the cultivated land of the country was held by the enterprises.

From the very beginning, cooperatives were imposed on a largely reluctant peasantry. It is true that in some areas, poor peasants who were either landless, or eked out a living on insufficient or marginal land, voluntarily requested to be organized into cooperatives. When this happened, party (occasionally MoA) agents assigned the best land in the area to them, evicting those who did not wish to join. On occasions, agricultural labourers and casual workers employed on what were private plantations before the land reform were allowed to convert the plantations into cooperatives for their own benefit. PCs were formed by a variety of unethical methods. On occasions, organizers made exaggerated or, at times, false promises to prospective co-operators; high benefits, high living standards, and lavish state support were the prospects most frequently offered. The best land in each community, and valuable resources such as pasture areas or water points, were reserved for co-operators. This often involved evicting large numbers

of households and either relocating them on poorer land or leaving them landless. According to a recent MoA document, the number of households relocated in this manner during the 1980s was 488,000, and those made landless 196,000 (MoA 1989c); this gives a total population of about three million. If none of these methods worked, there was the veiled or open threat of dispossession. Co-operators who decided to leave the enterprises forfeited their land and other assets they had brought to the enterprises initially.

Producers' cooperatives were not participatory structures in any sense of the term. Few PCs were set up by peasants themselves. The common practice was for party and/or government agents to initiate the idea and organize the structures from beginning to end. Officials were often hand picked and 'elections' were held merely to endorse them. Party and other officials frequently intervened in the routine activities of the enterprises, dictating cropping, harvesting and marketing plans. Much of the harvest went for basic subsistence, as co-operators were often paid in kind, and any surplus was sold directly to the AMC at regulated prices. There was often corruption in the enterprises, perpetrated by the collusion of the 'elected' officials and the party agents in the locality.

The evidence shows quite clearly that PCs were inefficient, and inferior to individual peasant enterprises in terms of productivity and of proper use of resources (Dessalegn 1994). Part of the problem was to do with poor management, poor labour deployment practices, and poor planning. Most, however, significant was the fact that the enterprises did not belong to the members, and hence the latter were insufficiently motivated to provide the kind of effort necessary to make co-operation a success. The cooperatives were not popular either among the participating peasants or among those outside their framework. To the surrounding peasantry the enterprises were a threat, a source of insecurity and a burden. Individual peasants close by often had to provide free labour during the peak seasons to the enterprises. How unpopular the schemes were may be gauged by the fact that only a few weeks after the mixed economy reforms were announced a great majority of PCs were disbanded by their own members.

Service Cooperatives

Service cooperatives (SCs) are older than producers' cooperatives, having been established as part of the land reform process. Their main responsibilities were to provide essential services to their members, of

which the most important were modern inputs, credit, marketing outlets and better prices for peasant produce, and consumer goods and services. They thus combined the functions of marketing and purchasing cooperatives. While they were formed largely by government fiat, and without sufficient participation by the peasantry, the services they provided were welcomed by peasants. By the end of the 1980s there were over 4000 SCs in the country (see Table 14.1) but only about a third had become registered and acquired legal recognition. In this same period they had taken out loans worth about 55 million birr. Their initial working capital was raised mainly through contributions by participating households, each of which 'loaned' the enterprises as much as 25 birr. This fund was to have been returned to the original contributors once the cooperatives were in a strong financial position, but few of them returned the loans. In fact, the enterprises did not have a profit-sharing arrangement, and the benefits they provided were mainly consumer and milling services.

SCs have opened up some employment opportunities; the number of full time employees hired by them to carry out routine activities (such as flour mill operators, shop attendants, or clerical workers) was estimated to be about 8000 in 1990. A number of SCs also had credit schemes for their members. These were often revolving funds offered largely to poor peasants to enable them to purchase oxen or other essential assets; the loans were to be paid back over a period of time. Other cooperatives took responsibility for the distribution of fertilizers or seeds to member households, often on credit. Some also operated workshops for making and repairing hand tools and other basic equipment. In the majority of cases, however, the enterprises were mainly involved in consumer services.

The tasks of the leaders centred almost exclusively on purchasing consumer goods, and running the shops and the mills, and success or failure was measured by the profitability of these two activities. Indeed, virtually all the conversations I had with officials of the SCs I visited centred around the problem of stocking and running the cooperative shops. Most of the cooperative shops were loss-making; a few just managed to break even, and only a handful made a small profit. In contrast, the milling services many SCs provided were of great benefit to women. They saved women, who otherwise would have to travel to the urban areas, the arduous task of making long trips carrying heavy loads of grain and flour. Inevitably, wastage and misuse of resources occurred on a large scale. The Ministry of Agriculture, which was

responsible for auditing rural cooperatives, uncovered considerable financial improprieties among most of the enterprises it investigated. MoA documents show that in the three years between 1987 and 1989, more than 24 million birr was misappropriated by the SCs it audited.

While some of the financial irregularities may be attributed to poor financial management and poor record keeping, there is reason to believe that outright embezzlement was quite considerable. In conclusion, Ethiopian cooperatives (both PCs and SCs) had neither dedicated leadership, an efficient system of management, nor active support from below. Matters were made worse by the fact that, as noted above, the leaders in most cases were not elected by the membership, and did not consider themselves accountable to them.

The Collapse of Military Socialism

There are a number of questions concerning the last years of the Derg that social scientists and others will have to examine carefully if they are to make the history of the Ethiopian revolution and the military-socialist experience of the 1980s more complete and more intelligible. Of those that readily spring to mind, only two will be of interest to us here. First, why did the Derg persist, despite all the evidence to the contrary, despite the massive wastage of resources, the alarmingly poor record, and the growing discontent that was building up in the rural areas, in stubbornly pursuing its agrarian socialist policies almost to the end, i.e. up to the year before its downfall? Secondly, when did the Derg realize (if indeed it did) the full gravity of its political situation and begin to suspect that its own downfall was imminent? Both questions have a strong subjective element, and until some revealing evidence is brought to light any answer offered will be subject to controversy.

Many have blamed the persistence of orthodoxy in ideology, and the hard-line approach in policy, on the uncompromising attitude of the state and party leadership, especially of Mengistu Haile Mariam and his close subordinates (Henze 1991; Korn 1986). Such an 'intentionalist' explanation centring primarily on the personality of one individual, however, remains partial and inadequate. It is true that there was a strong element of obduracy and doctrinal rigidity on the part of these individuals, but it is also true that there was an inflexible structure of reform management as well. Additionally, however, the forces from below tending towards a greater acceleration of Stalinist programmes were more significant than has been commonly realized.

Undoubtedly, to Mengistu and his associates, the efficacy of ideology had been repeatedly proved, and we need only look back at the early history of the Derg to understand how ideology was reinforced by what the leadership saw as political success. Colonel Mengistu rose to power and retained it not just by outwitting his opponents in the Derg (which he certainly did) but also by the judicious use of 'ideology', which in every case seemed to provide a more coherent outlook and a firmer guide to action. In the first few years as a radical, and after 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist, he disarmed or disarrayed his opponents by what seemed to be his greater sense of direction, purpose and timing. It was as a Marxist-Leninist state that the Derg under him succeeded in unlocking Soviet military aid at the critical moment when the country was threatened with catastrophe by the invasion of Somalia. The Derg's victory against the civilian opposition, of both the left and right, in the second half of the 1970s was attributed to its espousal of the correct ideology: by adopting 'genuine socialism' it succeeded – or so its supporters believed – in pulling the rug from under the feet of its opponents (see Dessalegn 1987b; Halliday and Molyneux 1981. For a confused, impressionistic and over-dramatized account of the early days of the revolution, see Lefort 1983). In brief, ideological orthodoxy and hard-line policies had served the Derg well in the past, and there seemed no reason to believe that it would not serve it similarly in the future.

Secondly, the symbolic dramatizations of socialism, which began in earnest in the last years of the 1970s and became a regular feature of the revolutionary agenda during the 1980s, had a deeply seductive effect on the leadership. Public endorsement of socialist programmes and the legitimization of the leaders themselves at elaborately staged ceremonies came to be seen as a potent affirmation of ideology. These 'open theatres', which occasionally turned into ecstasies of chanting, singing and marching, were taken as manifestations of popular support and revolutionary enthusiasm. To the men at the top, these public displays were living testimony to the widespread mass appeal and success of the revolutionary process they had charted, and they were convinced that despite some minor setbacks here and there the new course was destined to achieve great things.

Lower down the party, however, in particular at the sub-province or district level, the mental attitude was different, and the faith in the miraculous power of ideology was distinctly lacking. Nevertheless, the question of jettisoning military socialism for the greater good of

successful development did not arise. On the contrary, the party at the lower levels strongly wanted to continue, indeed to accelerate, the pace of socialization. For the party functionaries and many of the state officials in the regions, their future was irrevocably tied to the consolidation and continued expansion of socialism. Thus the pressure from below on the leadership was real, and the strong loyalty to Marxism-Leninism vocally professed by men and women from the grassroots could only be ignored at the risk of sowing the seeds of doubt. These professions of loyalty from below served at the same time to reinforce the commitment of Mengistu and his henchmen.

Thirdly, the armed oppositions operating in the north of the country, the EPLF and the TPLF, while fighting for ethnic causes, laid claim to the Marxist-Leninist mantle just as fervently as did the Derg, frequently attacking the latter for, among other things, its anti-Marxism and its cynical manipulation of socialist ideology. It was like a contest to prove who had the best socialist credentials, a game that had been played out in the late 1970s with the urban opposition, one which the Derg had eventually won. To abandon ideological orthodoxy in these circumstances would have been to concede defeat. Let us also not forget that to the ruling authorities, socialism was not just a convenient instrument for pursuing power, national development and reconstruction, but the source of political legitimacy, the prime justification for everything that had been done since 1978: the restructuring of the state apparatus which culminated in 1987 in the most elephantine bureaucracy ever attempted in the country; the terror and massive purges (both in the civilian and military sectors) that took place periodically, and which between 1979 and 1982 alone may have claimed some 12,000 to 15,000 lives; and the realignment of the country in the international arena.

Were the ruling authorities fully aware of the economic crisis of the country, and in particular of the parlous state of agricultural production? There is ample evidence to show that the Derg was sufficiently cognizant of the deteriorating condition of the economy and the difficult prospects that lay ahead, and for this we need go no further than the numerous state-of-the-country reports delivered by Mengistu Haile Mariam. Problems were blamed on the machinations of the enemies of the country and anti-revolutionary forces, on war and natural disaster. Frequently the difficulties of making the transition from a backward economy to a socialist one were identified as reasons for some of the failures and the slow pace of progress. That socialism would succeed in

the end, and that it was the right road to progress was, however, never seriously questioned.

Finally, we should add that the Derg persisted in pursuing agrarian socialism because neither the urban opposition, the armed anti-government forces operating in the rural areas, nor civilian professionals seriously opposed it or offered viable alternatives.³

Let us now turn to the second issue, the issue of the Derg's perception of its own survival and the critical moment when it saw that survival in imminent danger. There are those who have always seen the military government as being on the verge of imminent collapse, and one of these, Markakis (1979), had pointed out as early as 1978 that without propping up by the Soviet Union, military socialism would have disintegrated long ago. On the other hand, there have been those who, as recently as 1988, thought the regime was almost indestructible. Clapham (1987) believed, for example, that Mengistu's government was solidly entrenched and unshakeable, and dismissed as foolhardy anyone who thought it was in any danger of displacement. He appreciated the 'highly effective, disciplined and centralized state-system', and saw the party as exceedingly capable and determined (Clapham 1988). When these remarks were written, the party was no more than three years' old, if we discount its days as a semi-secret organization which no one, least of all Mengistu, had confidence enough in to entrust with serious political work. Clapham obviously mistook the shadow for the substance.⁴

If the Derg leadership did finally anticipate its own demise it must have been at the moment when it was already too late. It is quite likely that a considerable number of high officials in the civil, military and party apparatus did not see it coming, or did not wish to believe it could

3. There was considerable criticism of government policy from academic circles and occasionally from the ONCCP; for examples of academic criticism see papers presented by university staff at international conferences (references of proceedings of many such conferences in Abbink 1992); for ONCCP, see references in Dessalegn 1987.
4. This may appear as an unfair criticism of Clapham, made from hindsight, but I believe it is not. I know from experience, having lived in the country all through the Derg period, that few respectable people in the country had anything but the most uncomplimentary views about the ESP. Had Clapham conducted oral interviews, or some kind of survey of public opinion, his enthusiasm for the party would have been more restrained. A real survey would of course have been impossible at the time, but a modest one could have been discreetly carried out.

happen, until the time of Mengistu Haile Mariam's flight from the country. This probably explains why almost all the officials who made up the power structure of military socialism gave themselves up without resistance a few days after the transfer of power. Over 20 cabinet ministers, numerous generals and other high ranking military officers, and scores of senior party officials reported for detention and were bundled off to various prison camps in the first week of the transitional government.

It is quite unlikely that the central leadership had begun to realize that it was heading for a humiliating end by the time of the aborted military coup of 1989. By that time, military socialism had destroyed two of its most indispensable instruments of power, the military, which had been its bulwark all through the revolution, and the credibility of the media, which had served it so well in the 1970s. The coup occurred at a most signal moment: the humiliating defeat of the Third Army in Tigray and its retreat from the province on the one hand, and the alarming breakdown of discipline and morale in the armed forces on the other. The latter was the inevitable result of nearly a decade of 'socialization' in the armed forces promoted by Mengistu and pursued by his hatchetman, Sergeant Legesse Asfaw. The corruption of the military had reached such a stage that most of the senior officers were thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the soldiery. Some of the officers serving in the north and east, the zones of conflict, were known to be heavily involved in black market activities; others were suspected of embezzlement and diverting military and other supplies destined for the war front to their own benefit. Very few of the commanding officers, some of whom owed their position to party membership and political activism, showed much ability in planning operations or providing leadership in combat. In brief, the Ethiopian military, which under the old regime was one of the most highly regarded fighting forces in Africa (a fact Mengistu Haile Mariam grudgingly recognized in his last public address in April 1991), was thoroughly corrupted and reduced to impotence.⁵

5. Lefever (1970: Chapter 4), who made a comparative study of African military forces, speaks very highly of the Ethiopian army, several units of which distinguished themselves in the Korean War in the 1950s, and in the peace-keeping mission in the Congo in the early 1960s, winning high praise from a number of Western military specialists. A full history of the Ethiopian military has yet to be written.

Whatever the motives of the coup leaders, it failed and a large number of officers, many of them from the army divisions deployed in the war zone, were brutally executed. The coup attempt was so ineptly organized, so pitifully amateurish (and the leaders were all high-ranking officers) that if, by chance, it had succeeded one wonders whether the men who led it would have provided the country with a better leadership and a more viable political programme. It is a tradition in this country to ascribe to failed rebels and coup leaders noble intentions and unselfish motives, and the conspirators of 1989 will long be held in high esteem in the popular imagination whether they deserve it or not.

While obviously relieved that the coup attempt had failed, some within the party establishment were nevertheless disquieted by the turn of events and disturbed by the lack of progress in the war effort. Their apprehension was further heightened when, on the morning of 5 March 1990, Mengistu delivered his own *coup de main* against his functionaries in the party and state. This was a remarkable act from the standpoint of its timing, its content and authorship, and however the script of the drama was prepared, it had all the appearance of a mini-conspiracy. At a stroke socialism was declared a failure, ESP was dissolved, collectivization was dismantled, all state-imposed restrictions on peasant production, marketing and pricing lifted, and the command economy was replaced by a mixed-economy (Dessalegn 1993 for details). It was thus that Mengistu Haile Mariam came to bury military socialism, which he and his close associates had so ruthlessly constructed for over a decade, and in the course of which countless people had been brutally murdered and countless others imprisoned, tortured and repressed.

The 1990 reforms have been described by a long-time adviser to the country's planning agency (Belshaw 1990: 42) as a top-down counter-revolution:

The 1990 policy reforms can be viewed as a counter-revolution from above encouraged by advisers from both Western and Eastern power blocs. Whilst they have been greeted sceptically by some Western observers ... most proposals have a lengthy background of Ethiopian reformist support, suggesting a genuine commitment to a new development strategy based on a mixed economy.

This sounds like the distressed testimony of a political sympathizer

caught in an uncomfortable contradiction. The last statement in the quote cannot be farther from the truth; on the contrary, there is a lengthy background of backlash against advocates of a mixed economy or liberalization. One of the justifications given for the execution of Colonel Atnafu Abate, for example, the vice-chairman of the Derg in 1977, was that he had advocated a policy of mixed economy – and this at a time when Stalinist orthodoxy had not yet become the ruling outlook. On numerous public occasions, the last one in 1987, Mengistu has denounced all those who supported private enterprise or called for the dampening of the socialist offensive. The recommendations of the Soviet advisers for limited liberalization submitted to the party in 1985 was rejected on the grounds that it was unsuitable to Ethiopian conditions.

Here, in summary, are what I believe to be the causes and motivations behind the 1990 reforms:

- The reforms constituted not a heart-felt reversal of old policies, but rather a concession, a tactical retreat forced upon the regime by the civil war and the growing discontent within the peasantry.
- They were a recognition on the part of the Derg that as the civil war dragged on and intensified, the regime would increasingly become dependent on the peasantry for food deliveries, military recruits, foreign exchange, and ideological support. The policy shift was therefore meant to win the hearts and souls of the peasantry as well as to lift the morale of the army in the field, which was largely made up of peasant recruits.
- They reflected Mengistu's attempt to return to the populist days of the mid-1970s, and to distance himself from the party, which was now tacitly acknowledged to be a liability more than an asset.
- The reforms were aimed at unlocking the vaults of the big donors, which had frequently in the past promised vast sums of money in return for liberalization.

While the end of agrarian socialism was welcomed by all peasants, it failed to achieve the results that the regime had hoped for. Peasant mistrust of the government was not allayed; the military effort continued to deteriorate, with the insurgents expanding their zone of operations without encountering much effective resistance. The crisis of the state worsened as neither the party, which quickly became ineffective as it found itself abandoned by Mengistu, nor the civil bureaucracy

were in any position to stop the political haemorrhage spreading throughout the country. If the state was kept alive for another year or so after the reforms, it was mostly done, as it were, by artificial respiration.

The situation in the countryside became increasingly difficult for the party cadres after the reforms. The abolition of agrarian socialism stripped them of their power, removed their justification for interventions in peasant production, and threatened to close off their illicit sources of income. A good number of party activists left the countryside soon after the reforms, and those that remained continued to function, albeit in a marginal manner, because of their links with the rural elite – the officers of the mass organizations, particularly of the cooperatives, who had been recruited into the party on a large scale – with whom they had in the past colluded and with whom they retained the same ties of collusion for private ends.

The regime's last and desperate gamble came about a month before its final collapse. On 22 April 1991, a hastily called *Shengo* met and issued a lengthy peace package in which it was suggested that the Derg would go to the extent of considering a kind of 'coalition' political setup with opposition organizations and forces. A few days later, Mengistu dissolved his Council of Ministers and allowed the formation of a new one. Although he did not give up any of his own powers, the new cabinet was meant to placate the opposition. The situation, though, was hopeless, and the collapsing rubble of his military structure was threatening to bury him in its ruins when Mengistu decided to make his getaway. He waited until he was certain that there was no last chance of reversing the tide and saving his power. When this was confirmed with the rout of the reconstituted Third Army based in Wallo, he flew out of the country surreptitiously on the morning of 21 May, leaving his comrades-in-arms, advisers and subordinates in the lurch. Those who have suggested that he was shrewdly pushed out by his crafty subordinates do him more honour than he deserves.

Rural Agitation

1990: Peaceful Agitation

The end of agrarian socialism, which the peasantry had not expected, did not lead to a festival of the oppressed; on the contrary, the response to the institutions that were part of the programmes as well as to the people who implemented, managed and controlled them, was much

more restrained than many of us had expected. When acts of hostility and violence did occur they were selective and directed, and not indiscriminate. Peasant anger was directed first and foremost at collectivization: in the minds of many peasants, agrarian socialism was associated primarily with producers' cooperatives, and it was these that posed the most serious threat to peasants' sense of security. There was a new climate of opinion following the reforms, and, though subdued and undramatic, a wave of change was sweeping through the countryside.

The first and most decisive act of peasants following the reforms was decollectivization, i.e. the disbanding of PCs, the redistribution of their assets and the return to individual farming (see Dessalegn 1993 for details). The task was accomplished in the main rapidly, efficiently and equitably; in a number of cases measures were taken by cooperators to settle their debts and other obligations as part of their redistribution process. In less than three months almost all cooperatives had been dissolved. What remained standing were a few heavily subsidized model enterprises and enterprises in which the division of assets had become too difficult to settle. In the latter case, the disputes that arose (over the value of previously collectivized assets, claims by peasants to particular pieces of land that had previously belonged to them, claims of non-members whose land was occupied by the cooperatives and so forth) were so highly charged that on occasions they led to violence. In one case in Wollaita, where the dispute had become impossible to settle to the satisfaction of everyone, the manager of the enterprise, who had been in the post from the very beginning, was kept in detention in his office and was not allowed out until the problem was solved. Nevertheless, despite these contentious cases, the operation as a whole was well executed.

Peasants took the initiative in the decollectivization process. In many cases they were unwilling to elicit or accept outside help or guidance. Party and extension agents were particularly unwelcome, for it was they who had only recently been extolling the virtues of agrarian socialism, and who had pressed and intimidated them into collectivization, threatening those who were unwilling with relocation or eviction. Peasants also remembered that many of the socialization programmes were planned and implemented with great haste, without deliberation with the participants concerned, and without taking into account the circumstances of individual households. Peasants had thus no confidence in the ability of these agents to deal properly with the problems involved in decollectivization. They had also witnessed enough cases of corrup-

tion involving party and extension agents and cooperative leaders to reinforce their mistrust. It is true that the 1990 reforms caught party agents and other officials in the field off guard, and that those among them who had been particularly zealous in promoting socialization programmes may have found it personally difficult to face the peasants again, but it was not evident at the time of my field visits that many were seriously troubled by a crisis of conscience.

The pace of devillagization was slower. For understandable reasons peasants took longer to leave their villages and return to their original home sites. Some village schemes were still standing more than a year after the reforms. Nevertheless, when account is taken of the difficulties of moving and rebuilding homesteads, the fact that (by my estimation) more than half the villagers had moved out of the schemes during the first six months of the reforms was a significant achievement. The changes sweeping the countryside in the aftermath of the reforms did not leave state agriculture untouched. In areas where it had a particularly bad reputation for land evictions, alienating community resources or exacting *corvée* from peasants, demands were raised for the redress of grievances. In some areas, part of its land was reoccupied by peasants who used it either for pasture or to redistribute to needy peasants.

It is unclear whether the ESP at head office had issued any instructions to its agents in the field about implementing the reforms, or, when once the peasants had seized the initiative, whether the party was to assist, slow down or stop the progress of decollectivization. In any event the agents' response at the local level was contradictory. In many areas, they wisely did not attempt to intervene in the decollectivization process taking place; in others they seem to have given it their tacit blessing; and in yet others they took vigorous measures to slow down or even stop the peasants' initiative. Their intervention in the latter form was, however, resisted (in some areas vigorously so) by the peasants involved. In Hararge, where villagization had been imposed on a bitterly resentful peasantry and where there was a particularly urgent need to dismantle the village schemes, party cadres who attempted to intervene in devillagization were shot at and driven out of the countryside by the threat of armed violence. In eastern Gojjam, peasants shot and killed some half-dozen party members who came to dissuade them from disbanding their cooperatives. In the Bolosso district of Wollaita *awraja*, party and extension agents were chased out of the rural areas by angry peasants who accused them of being perpetrators of injustice and corruption.

Finally, we should note the peasants' changed attitudes to the rural institutions, which in one way or another had exerted such a significant influence on their lives. As an extension of the state, as pillars of local power, or as distributors of resources, they had, for over 15 years, brought hardship and suffering to some, catastrophe and ruin to others, benefits and rewards to a limited few. In the changed climate of opinion following the reforms, there was naturally strong criticism of the record of both PAs and SCs, but at the same time many peasants recognized that it was not the institutions that failed them but rather leaders who were accountable not to their community but to the governing authorities outside. Peasants tended to view the institutions from a sort of Manichaean perspective: there were first the stated objectives of PAs and SCs, many of which were acceptable to most peasants, and second the appointed leaders who in many cases abused their authority and lost the confidence of the membership. In this spirit, re-election of PA leaders was demanded in some of the communities I visited, and subsequently some re-elections were in fact held there as well as in other places. PAs lost all authority and significance, and the relentless exploitation of the peasantry by the state effected through them came to an end. The SCs, on the other hand, went, as it were, into hibernation for a time, their fate seeming to hang in the balance. However, they were subsequently redeemed and resumed their operations mainly because the services they provided, particularly the milling and consumer services, were in great demand.

It is clear, though it does not appear so on the surface, that the events of March 1990 were to a majority of peasants as significant as those of March 1975. The reforms so dramatically introduced by Mengistu H. Mariam announced the end of agrarian socialism and presaged the decline of Derg authority in the countryside. Peasants came to realize that the state was in paralysis, and while they were not quite clear of the nature of the disease that had crippled it, they were aware that the civil war was at least one of the prime causes. Those peasants close to the war zone were in fact monitoring the disintegration of state authority almost on a daily basis. In some of these areas, the party cadre, the cooperative or the state farm had long disappeared along with the army and the police. It was in these circumstances that the practical tasks of laying agrarian socialism to rest and securing the foundations of petty proprietorship and peasant economy were accomplished. And this was done with considerable discipline and restraint: there were no acts of vandalism against rural institutions, of looting of SC or PA stores and

property; there was no anarchy, nor vengeance and retaliation against persons or officials for past injustices. Many of the leaders of the PAs and SCs remained in office all through the period of post-reform changes.

1991: Looting and Vandalism

In the last week of May and early June 1991, when the Derg had collapsed and the new government had not yet consolidated its power, considerable rural disorder occurred throughout the country. Between the time Mengistu Haile Mariam took flight on 21 May, and 28 May when the rebel forces entered the capital, and perhaps another week or so before their forces established their presence in the southern provinces, there was practically no state or public authority in the central and southern parts of the country. In these circumstances the disorder took place accompanied by an extraordinary orgy of looting, destruction of property and other acts of vandalism.

The collapse of public authority on the one hand, and the breakdown of law and order on the other, did not in many places occur at the same time; there were considerable delays, though these were a matter of days rather than weeks. The PAs, which functioned frequently as law and order forces, had earlier been disgraced by the 1990 reforms as discussed above, and were immobilized when the forces of Derg authority fell apart. The establishment of the authority of the new government was soon followed by the round-up and detention of officials of the rural mass organizations on the grounds that they were part of the old structure of the state and members of the ruling party, the ESP. It is true that a great number of SC officials were party members, whereas only a small percentage of their counterparts in the PAs had been recruited. Nevertheless, by the end of June, when almost all areas of the country were under the control of the new government, between 6000 and 8000 peasants, officials of SCs and PAs and others alleged to be party members, were detained. While many of them were subsequently released, the detention created a vacuum in the rural areas, which left rural society unprotected from unscrupulous forces who used the occasion for their own personal gain.

Secondly, the police were removed from their posts and the local courts closed down immediately after the new forces displaced the Derg. This removed all symbols of public authority from the countryside. Thirdly, as the rebel forces advanced through the regions, district and provincial administrators either fled or were captured and placed

under arrest. The fate of ESP cadres and officials was similar, and some of those who fled to the neighbouring countries did so after looting their own offices, banks and other public establishments. In other circumstances, ESP cadres simply absconded with public funds in their possession, such as those belonging to cooperatives and settlement schemes, when the conditions became tight. News of these and other dramatic acts involving robbery by public officials spread quickly through the countryside. Some may even argue that the formal looting by party and other officials increased in frequency so much that it almost appeared as if the party had given the signal for the public pillage that subsequently occurred.

What was looted and why? The main targets of robbery and vandalism were assets belonging to rural institutions, government or parastatal agencies, and NGOs. I shall focus on rural institutions as more information is available on the damage they suffered. The most highly prized targets of looters were often the service cooperatives. Most looters recognized that the SCs had stores of consumer goods, valuable property as well as cash on their premises, hence they were frequently the first to be attacked. Then came PA offices and stores, and thirdly parastatals. The latter were believed to offer good opportunities, for in addition to the valuable goods that many expected, they also had on their premises equipment that could be taken apart – small tools, spare parts and other items with a good market value. Furthermore, some camps that had stores of food grain and other supplies were also attacked, including those belonging to NGOs. Finally, in a number of peri-rural towns, government offices, workshops, and even, on occasions, schools were broken into and wrecked. In Jimma, for example, the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture were thoroughly sacked. The prized items stolen, I was told, were furniture, typewriters, office equipment and stationery.

It is of course impossible to put a figure on the loss incurred in these disturbances. The severity of the damage and the number of establishments attacked is still unknown. Nevertheless, I offer the following crude estimation for what it is worth: something like one-third of the SCs and perhaps a quarter of the PAs in the southern regions may have been seriously or moderately looted and/or vandalized. The loss of assets involved, including the damage to parastatals and other establishments, may reach between 125 and 150 million birr. However, the cost to the nation, to rural society and, above all, to the development effort is incalculable. Not only cooperatives and similar

institutions that were pillaged, but also state and community forestry, environmental protection schemes, national parks and wild-life reserves, agricultural experimental stations, coffee processing enterprises and development projects of one sort or another.

One may detect a pattern to the incidents of looting and vandalism, but there does not seem to be a strong causal relationship between the occurrences and the war. Many rural institutions were of course destroyed in the fighting, but the areas in which fighting took place were not necessarily the ones in which large-scale looting occurred. There were only a few lootings, for example, in the southern Wallo and northern Shoa where there was intense fighting. There were no reported cases in Buno-Bedele *awraja*, where there had been considerable fighting. On the other hand, in central and eastern Kafa, where there was no fighting, 43 out of 143 SCs were looted and a majority of them razed to the ground. Similarly, in the central district of Wollaita, 8 out of a total of 16 SCs were plundered and destroyed. In the western region of Gojjam about 60 per cent of the SCs in the area were plundered and demolished (see MoA 1991; Dessalegn 1992a).

Looting, arson, wrecking and the destruction of natural resources and infrastructure – such in the main were the disorders of 1991. Looting was often thorough. While cash and merchandise were the high prize, it included stripping buildings of their tin roofing, their window and door frames, their fixtures, their wood and any other items that could be carted away. Some SCs and PAs were stripped so thoroughly that we could barely tell where the buildings had stood when we visited the sites. Looting also involved stripping machinery and equipment of parts, or wrecking or gutting them if this proved difficult. The areas that experienced more serious incidents of pillage had the following characteristics: high population congestion and village-type settlement patterns; high youth unemployment, a high number of disbanded soldiers and militia; and the SCs were close to the roads and to small peri-rural towns. The exceptions were western Kafa and Gojjam, where the disorders were caused by soldiers fleeing from their camps.

While public opinion blames the peasants for all the destruction of public property in the rural areas, evidence I collected in several parts of the country, though not fully absolving the peasantry, tells a somewhat different story. My findings indicate that the perpetrators of public disorder and looting were chiefly Derg soldiers, often fleeing from the war front or from their camps, lumpen elements from the towns, who were often joined by unemployed rural youth and demobilized peasant

militiamen, poor peasants and peasants seeking to destroy evidence.

By the latter part of the 1980s the Derg army had turned into an undisciplined and disorderly mass. In many places it was in effect no better than a mob in uniform, liable to disintegration at the least provocation. The large army camp in Jimma, for instance, simply broke up at the approach of the rebel forces without so much as putting up a token resistance. As the army units collapsed (in Jimma and Gojjam in particular) bands of soldiers went through the countryside looting and destroying public property. They sought out cooperatives in particular, but any establishment they came across that offered booty was fair game. These soldiers, most of whom were trying to get back home, were often heavily armed and peasants were helpless to protect their cooperatives. It should be noted that the army was made up of two elements – peasants pressed into service against their will, and unemployed and lumpen urban elements who were similarly recruited. There are indications that it was chiefly the latter who perpetrated much of the anarchy.

In areas far from the war zone, like southern Ethiopia, the perpetrators were a melange of lumpen elements, the destitute and former militiamen, the latter often in possession of arms. The pillage and the sacking was the work of spontaneous crowds made up of the underclass of the localities in question and swelled by fortune hunters, the excitable and even ordinary peasants who may have turned temporarily reckless at the prospects of 'easy gain, no pain'. Given the alarmingly large size of the underclass in these areas and the shocking level of poverty and destitution, it would have been remarkable under the circumstances if there had been no disorder or looting.

What kind of peasants were actually involved? The available evidence suggests that two kinds of peasants took the risk and joined in the looting. First, poor peasants, particularly those heavily in debt to the SCs and PAs who had difficulty settling their obligations. Many SCs ran credit programmes and a majority of the beneficiaries were poor peasants. Many poor and middle peasants in Wollaita, for instance, were heavily indebted to the cooperatives and some had outstanding debts going back several years (see Dessalegn 1992b). Second, were officials of the SCs who had been heavily involved in embezzlement or other financial improprieties. Both kinds actively participated in the destruction of the enterprises in the belief that they would be relieved of their debts, or their misdeeds would be covered up. It is quite revealing that the attacks on the large cooperatives in Wollaita were not just carried out for the purposes of looting, but also to raze the buildings to

destroy records and incriminating evidence. NGOs emerged from the disturbances with little damage to their assets and investments, not to say their reputations.

There were a few incidents of looting and arson of NGO property, mainly in the southern provinces. In north-west Wollaita, for example, Redd Barna-Ethiopia's rural clinic, which was in the same compound as a large well-stocked SC, was looted and destroyed along with the SC itself. In southern Wollaita, a big camp with supply stores and other facilities belonging to World Vision was thoroughly plundered and subsequently razed to the ground with explosives. In the town of Shone in southern Shoa province, a big grain store operated by the Irish NGO, Concern, was also looted. A few other examples of this sort may be added, but on the whole assets and infrastructure belonging to or constructed by NGOs in most of the rural areas were not damaged thanks largely to peasant support and active intervention. 'As the previous regime broke down,' states a report by the Norwegian NGO, Redd Barna-Ethiopia (1992: 5), which operates rural projects in five different regions in the country, 'extensive looting of both government and private property took place in the country. Due to good community relations in all areas we work, Redd Barna-Ethiopia has come through 1991 without significant looting or other damage. In many areas Redd Barna-Ethiopia's staff and property have been actively protected by the local people.'

This brings me to the other aspect of the events of 1991, which should be placed on record lest one is left with the impression that rural society as a whole was in a frenzy of uncontrolled turbulence and that every peasant had turned into a thief and a wrecker. Despite the hazardous situation many peasants risked their lives to defend their cooperatives and other common resources from robbery and destruction. I visited a number of cooperatives, PAs, flour mills and storage depots in Wollaita and Kafa that had been saved by the community from bands of marauders or raiding crowds; many of these were in good condition at the time of my visit though some had suffered partial damage. It takes considerable courage and a strong sense of responsibility to stand up to bands of fleeing soldiers, excitable crowds bent on pillage, or unscrupulous lumpen armed bands, but this is exactly what many peasants did in western Kafa and Wollaita. Peasants, who had no arms other than sticks and clubs, either fought off the attacking bands or managed to dissuade them from their intentions. The sight of a solemn gathering of peasants in front of their enterprises

was often enough to calm down and disperse bands or crowds intent on looting. On occasions, it was sufficient for two or three peasants to guard the enterprises to discourage raiding by criminal elements or idle youth seeking fun and excitement.⁶

It is important to remember that a great majority of peasants did not approve of the acts of pillage and vandalism in their communities and, most importantly, did not participate in them. Indeed, the more responsible and bolder elements among them took the initiative and the risk to protect their enterprises and common assets.

Let us now turn to another aspect of the agitation, namely the assault on the environment. The events surrounding this episode have not yet been fully sorted out, but, as noted earlier, the damage caused to state forestry projects, community wood lots, conservation schemes and other environmental infrastructure has been considerable. Let us digress here a little to place the events in perspective.

The history of environmental protection and the responses of peasants to conservation programmes, which were actively promoted throughout the Derg period, will take us too far from our subject. (For a fuller treatment of the subject see Kebede Tato 1990 and 1992. Kebede was for many years head of CFSCDD and is now head of SCRP. See also WFP 1989; Yeraswork 1988; and Campbell 1991. My own criticisms are similar to those voiced by many peasant informants.) Nevertheless, a brief discussion of some of the issues that eventually gave rise to a conflict of interest between state and peasantry is in order.

Until the second half of the 1980s, conservation consisted mainly of the construction of bunds and terraces (physical conservation) and the closure of degraded areas to allow land rehabilitation and afforestation (biological conservation). The principal objective of conservation was to reduce soil erosion. Though extensive tree planting and land rehabilitation were undertaken, the benefits of these to the local population – such as the provision of tree products, grass, water or feeder roads – were considered of secondary importance. Most of the physical structures, as well as a substantial proportion of the afforestation schemes, were constructed through Food for Work (FFW), provided mainly by the World Food Programme (WFP). Between 1976, when conservation formally began (with the MoA as the main imple-

6. In western Gojjam, peasants dismantled their own cooperatives, sold all the assets and divided the proceeds among themselves. This was partly to save the enterprises from being looted by roving bands of soldiers and others who were creating disorder in the surrounding areas.

menting body) and 1992, the WFP had committed some 900,000 metric tons of food aid valued at about US \$260 million to the conservation effort in the country.

Initially and until the mid-1980s, conservation was carried out hurriedly and improperly. The emphasis was on a uniform set of physical structures built without taking ecological, land use and soil factors into account and without involving the peasantry in the planning of projects and the choice of technology. Better conservation guidelines were issued to field agents in the second half of the 1980s (Hurni 1986), though how seriously these were followed is not quite clear. As shown in Table 14.2, most of the physical structures were built on peasant farm land, which caused conflict. MoA officials have claimed that peasants were hostile or indifferent to conservation (Kebede 1992) because they were ignorant of its benefits, but it is evident that peasants were not objecting to conservation *per se* but to the particular conservation measures promoted by field agents and the way in which these were *imposed* on them.

The physical structures constructed on peasant plots were often poorly designed and inappropriately built. They made ploughing difficult because the vertical space between structures was frequently too narrow to allow easy and efficient use of the plough. On-farm grazing of livestock caused damage to the structures, while stone-built terraces attracted and harboured rodents. Moreover – and this was a significant cause of peasant discontent – on-farm conservation took away valuable farm land (10 to 15 per cent was not uncommon) and, given the acute shortage of land in the rural areas, peasants found it hard to accept bunding and terracing on their farms. Furthermore, many peasants were *not convinced* that the schemes imposed on them were more effective than their own traditional practices.⁷

7. Research work carried out under the auspices of the SCRP now indicates that contrary to the claims of its proponents (see, for example, Kebede 1990; Yeraswork 1988) bunds and *fanya-juu*, the principal conservation measures promoted for over a decade do not contribute to improvements in crop yield (Herweg 1992).

**Table 14.2: MoA Estimates of Conservation Achievements 1976-90
(Area in Thousand Hectares)***

<i>Conservation Area</i>	<i>Est. I</i>	<i>Est. II</i>
Bunds/terraces on farms	445	771
Hillside terracing	175	233
Area closure (land rehabilitation)	135	390
Afforestation	181**	448***

Source: The first estimate is by Mulugeta Zeleke (1989), senior soil conservation expert with CFSCDD, and the second by Berhe W. Aregay (1992), head of CFSCDD. CFSCDD has been the main force behind the government's conservation drive since 1976.

Notes: * Figures have been rounded. In the same period 12,000-14,000 km. of check dams were said to have been built. ** Probably includes only CFSCDD plantations, i.e. community wood lots and catchment protection forestry. *** Probably includes state forestry (managed by SFCDD), peri-urban fuelwood plantations as well as CFSCDD projects. My own estimate of the first two is state forestry, 160,000 hectares; peri-urban plantations, 30,000 hectares.

On the other hand, Food for Work was a strong inducement, and many peasants engaged in conservation largely for the food they earned, which over the years came to be a significant source of supplementary income for many households. The authorities were not unaware of peasant attitudes and complaints (see MoA 1989c), but the main objective was to undertake as much conservation as possible, for more conservation meant more food aid. In the end, Food for Work subverted the goals of conservation. Peasants accepted bunds and terraces on their plots because of the food incentive, but they either refused to maintain them without payment, or removed the structures as soon as they thought they could get away with it. The structures, including those on hillsides, thus left unmaintained, deteriorated rapidly, giving rise to greater soil erosion.

Afforestation schemes had a similarly tangled history. FFW was the main inducement here too, but the trees that were planted and the forests that were protected did not belong to the local population, nor were adequate arrangements made for benefit sharing. State forests were inaccessible to all peasants, except poachers and illegal cutters,

while the issue of the ownership rights of community wood lots was never fully resolved, though occasionally privileged groups such as PCs were allowed to make use of community forest resources. Matters were made worse by rural policies which discouraged individual tree planting, and though the ESP leadership made some concessions in 1988 in favour of more secure tree and land ownership, peasants continued to harbour grave doubts about the benefits of state or community forests right up to the fall of the Derg.

Moreover, forestry development posed a threat to many peasants because of the insecurity of tenure that land reform and rural socialization had given rise to. State or community forest plantations were seen as government schemes for land engrossment and peasant evictions. Some communities were resentful because the plantations were located on traditional grazing land, or land of particular cultural or historical significance. Compensation was rarely offered to communities for the loss of their common lands. In short, as common property resources were in one way or another brought under state control, communities were faced with acute shortages of pasture land, fuelwood and tree products, grass or water sources.

At a 1992 conference attended by government and other officials involved in conservation and FFW programmes, the participants congratulated themselves on the 'impressive achievements' of environmental protection undertaken over the last 15 years. While acknowledging some shortcomings and occasional failures, they agreed that the overall result was highly positive, and that of the conservation measures in place since 1976, some 65 per cent were maintained and remained intact (FFW 1992: Annex 4, 41-2). This is highly exaggerated, though there are as yet no reliable figures of damage. Of the physical structures built on peasant farms, perhaps no more than 20 to 25 per cent still remain in place. The destruction of state and community forests has been quite extensive and about half the plantations may have been either harvested by peasants and others, or destroyed. On the other hand, a good many of the large-scale catchment protection schemes have not been seriously damaged. Most of the other physical structures – hillside terraces, check dams and service roads – have seriously deteriorated or disappeared altogether due to lack of proper maintenance.

The following are some cases of destruction of environmental infrastructure in which peasants played a significant role.

Nearly a third of the large forestry project stretching for 60 to 70 kilometres between Zwai and Shashemene in southern Shoa was

thoroughly despoiled; all the trees were cut down and the area stripped of vegetation. This was largely the work of urban charcoal-burners, ex-soldiers, lumpen elements acting individually or in groups, and freebooters. Peasants certainly joined in on the act but at a later stage. The area was a dust-bowl in the 1960s, having been cleared of all trees and vegetation through heavy logging in response to the booming fuelwood market at the time. In 1989, when I visited the area for an earlier project, peasants remembered the great damage caused by deforestation and the hardship they and their cattle had suffered at the time, and quite appreciated the conservation scheme in the area (see Taye Mengistae 1989). While the forestry project was enclosed to keep out peasants and logging operators, cattle were not actively barred from grazing in it and did so frequently, though the administrators were not happy about it. On the other hand, the area had long been favoured by charcoal burners because of the good quality of the charcoal obtained from local trees. It was the local variety of acacia that the forestry project had planted, and it was these that were systematically cut at the time of the looting.

In north Shoa, extensive 'illegal harvesting' by peasants of community forests and peri-urban plantations took place between Debre Berhan and Debre Sina. In the Sellale-Jarson-Debre Libanos region of the province, community and protected forests were destroyed by peasants; mature trees were 'harvested', young ones uprooted and the land ploughed up. According to MoA officials, the damage extends over 3000 hectares. The peasants' main grievance was that the forests had taken away their traditional grazing land and that they had not enjoyed any benefits from the plantations in return. In south Wallo, MoA agents reported that of a total of 13,000 hectares of forest planted in the province, some 60 per cent was either 'harvested' or destroyed in 1991. In north Wallo, a good deal of illegal cutting and destruction of community and state forestry had been going on for some years, perpetrated by the Derg army, which was deployed there in large numbers. Soldiers cut down trees for bunkers, to use as firewood, or simply to sell to urban consumers. When the army retreated, peasants moved in to harvest what was left. According to MoA officials in Woldya, the provincial capital, a rapid inventory carried out in early 1992 showed that about 90 per cent of the 10,000 to 15,000 hectare forest plantations in the province had been removed. In Gojjam in contrast, where afforestation had been carried out on a relatively small scale, most of the planted forests were reported to be intact.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to raise the following questions for discussion. What can we learn from the rural agitation that occurred in the closing years of Ethiopia's most traumatic political experience? Can we place the events discussed above in a wider historical and theoretical framework, or are they relevant only to our own experience? Do the events shed light on rural history and popular struggles, or should they be considered as insignificant incidents aroused by passing passions? The agitations of both 1990 and 1991 were undoubtedly the work of individuals and groups belonging for the most part to the popular classes. In 1990 the participants were peasants, particularly those who had been victimized by the policies of agrarian socialism. If we add up the estimates of the population said to be involved in cooperativization, villagization and resettlement, the main 'redistributive' programmes of the Derg, we get a figure of some 7.5 million which is roughly about 20 per cent of the rural population. It is this population (at least a majority of it) that actively took part in the agitation of 1990. In 1991 the participants were the semi-urban and rural under-class, the destitute, and poor and lower-middle peasants. The popular character of the agitation is thus not in doubt: what is in doubt is whether there is sufficient justification for looking at them as manifestations of social struggle and popular protest. Let us separate the two events. I believe there is general agreement that the earlier agitation, which was orderly and effective, was a celebration of the collapse of agrarian socialism, a collapse which was brought about in part by the silent and not so silent forms of popular resistance. The events of 1991, in contrast, are less clear cut and raise a lot of questions.

Popular history and social protest have of late attracted considerable interest in African studies, and historians and others have begun to pay close attention to unorthodox behaviour, such as popular violence or unlawful activity, as reflections of class relations and social struggles. Following European radical historians such as Hobsbawm, it has been argued that criminality and banditry are different elements of class conflict. If revolutions and rebellions manifest the open expressions of class struggle, criminality and banditry reflect, it is maintained, its hidden ones (Crummey ed. 1986: 22-9).⁸ While the revival of interest

8. For an example of a more discriminating study of criminality, see Arnold 1979; for studies of unorthodox forms of subaltern protest see Guha and Spivak (eds) 1988. Unlike Crummey, Hobsbawm (1969) does emphasize the difference between 'social' crime and common crime.

in 'unorthodox' behaviour and the underside of class conflict is a welcome contribution to popular history, there is I believe a danger that uncritical acceptance of such behaviour as evidence of class struggle will lead to the romanticization of all acts of subaltern violence and illegality, thus raising to heroic dimensions the common criminal or the vicious bandit whose acts have no redeeming virtue, and whose depredations are for the most part borne by the subaltern classes themselves. The idea that 'crime is inherently a forms of protest, since it violates the law' (Crummey 1986: 3) ignores the well established facts that in Africa most of the victims of 'popular violence' are the popular classes themselves and that most criminal acts have no class content but are merely desperate acts of survival employed by desperate people. Is poverty a cause of crime? Certainly. Is crime an aspect of class struggle? Sometimes, yes, often no. I believe if the concept of 'social crime' and 'popular violence' is to serve a useful purpose, we need to adopt a discriminating approach, asking first, not what the act consisted of, but who the victims were.

The rural agitation of 1991 should, in my opinion, be placed somewhere between criminality and protest. By criminality I here mean acts that violate not so much the law as defined by the state as the public interest and the public trust. The disorders under discussion struck at the public interest by destroying public property, but the acts were carried out within the bounds of acceptable conduct and in this sense respected the public trust. They were largely motivated by selfish ends and yet they had a political, hence protest, element in them. Here below is a summary of the main characteristics of the agitation.

The crowds that participated in almost all the disturbances were a mixture of men and women (yes, some women were involved) who came from different backgrounds: there were ordinary people who led ordinary lives; there were those with some or considerable criminal experience, those who would do anything for gain or for survival, and, in some cases, freebooters and adventurers. While some of the individuals may have banded together and planned their operations ahead of time, there is no evidence that the general plunder and vandalism was organized by outside forces or orchestrated by political parties. The crowds were formed largely spontaneously and they broke up and dispersed as soon as their goals were achieved, or when they met opposition and their intentions were frustrated. It is often not easy to identify the ring leaders, but sometimes they were urban lumpen elements, sometimes rural youth, sometimes ex-soldiers or militiamen. There was

frequently order in the disorder of the crowds: they knew exactly what they wanted, and they attacked quickly and often with deadly efficiency. There was no indiscriminate riotous behaviour, nor acts that violated community codes of conduct. Indeed, as I was informed in Wollaita, some of the lootings here were more like a revelry, a boisterous game conducted in a humorous spirit where onlookers felt they were watching a sort of unscripted public show.

The attacks were almost always against property, and they were invariably directed against public enterprises and establishments. SCs, PAs, parastatal enterprises, government institutions or, in some instances, NGOs were the targets of attack. In the minds of many, these were associated with the state and considered to be state property. In this sense, the agitation may be said to have been directed against the state, for many of these organizations served as its symbolic representatives at the local level. A comparison suggests itself here: as the homes of landlords were burned by peasant crowds as an act of protest against the existing agrarian system at the time of the 1974 revolution, so the SCs were now sacked as an act of symbolic protest against rural socialism. But there is a difference. Whereas earlier the propertied classes were the objects of attack, now public property and common resources were being destroyed. In the earlier case the landlords were hurt, in the latter the peasants themselves.

Another significant aspect of the disturbances was that they were not directed against individual property nor against individual persons.⁹ By and large, the homes, farms and other possessions of individuals, even the most hated officials of the rural institutions, were neither attacked nor threatened. There was no violence against individual persons or group of persons; even under the existing conditions, when law and order had collapsed, people did not resort to life-threatening forms of 'popular' violence, though undoubtedly there may have been individuals who used the occasion to settle old scores or to redress personal grievances.

Finally – and significant in the light of the ideology of the present government – the agitation of both 1990 and 1991 gave rise to neither ethnic conflict nor communal violence. In many places the ethnic question could not have arisen, for the communities were homogeneous, thanks in large part, to the 1975 land reform. However, in

9. Some of the soldier bands occasionally robbed individual homes and attacked persons.

communities where PAs and SCs were made up of different groups, and where on occasions the leadership of the institutions was dominated, or believed to be dominated, by one particular group, the agitation did not take an ethnic turn. It was thanks to the politics of ethnicity which was actively promoted by the new government through the media and other means that serious incidents of communal violence began to occur. The humble peasant in his small and isolated world has frequently shown much greater foresight, common sense and tolerance than his rulers with all their vaunted resources, intelligence and international outlook.

What lessons can we draw from the events discussed, events which now appear as a series of disconnected incidents, but which may turn out in the long run to have far-reaching consequences in terms of peasant consciousness and state-peasant relations? The larger issue here must be sought in the trajectory of the revolution and state-ideology, which I have dealt with at some length elsewhere (Dessalegn 1987b). Briefly stated, the ideology of the revolution projected itself initially as a force of liberation and of peasant empowerment, but turned out in the end, in the guise of military socialism, to be an instrument of domination over peasants, agrarian decline and the exhaustion of rural society. Imposed on an unwilling peasantry, and disastrous in all its agrarian undertakings, state-ideology came to an ignominious end when state power itself was beginning to crumble. If the behaviour of the peasantry in 1991 was not as explosive as it could very well have been, it was partly because peasants had earlier in 1990 regained their sense of worth and long-cherished wishes, at least in so far as land and the means of production were concerned. The events of 1991, therefore, are significant not for the destruction of property which ensued, but for the great restraint and sense of propriety shown by the majority of peasants in the country.

A point also germane to our question relates to the issue of development and reform management. The agitation of 1991, including the attack on development and environmental projects, must be viewed in a broader context which brings into question such basic issues as the goals of development policy, the management of reform and reconstruction, the participation of peasants, and the benefits and the beneficiaries involved. Looking at it from a wider perspective, and from a more positive standpoint, the agitation serves to remind us that development schemes imposed from above, and managed by civil bureaucrats with little or no regard for community participation and initiative

cannot be sustained, and may eventually come to a disastrous end unless protected by force which, to say the least, is costly and counter-productive.

15. The End of Crises? Or Crises Without End? The Evolving Dynamics in Post-Derg Ethiopia

Dawit Abate

The foregoing debate on the various facets of Ethiopian society during the Derg years reveals a plethora of problems that cry out for urgent attention by the appropriate agents, whether government bodies, political parties, movements, communities or individuals. How has the transitional government (TG) fared in this regard? Is there any hope that its declared commitment to democracy and economic reconstruction will be realized? What does the future hold for the resolution of the problems that afflict the people and perpetuate Ethiopia's under-development?

While the world may well wish Ethiopia all the best and while Ethiopians themselves pray and hope for an end to their incessant miseries, problems seem, in the short run, to have multiplied. The reactive stance of the EPRDF-dominated TG seems to be accentuating existing problems while adding a few more of their own making. The forcefulness with which the TG expressed support for political power-sharing among the national groups during their first few months in power has gradually been abandoned in practice and become their Achilles' heel.

Causes of the Fall of the Derg

When the news came through on Monday 20 May 1991 that Mengistu Haile Mariam had fled from power after 17 years of military rule, most observers of Ethiopia were somewhat surprised. The same event was received with more alarm inside Ethiopia itself, where few had anticipated that the dictator's rule would end in such a fashion. No one had

thought that the frequent references by Mengistu to the inspiration he claimed to draw from Theodros's patriotic devotion would turn out to be as hollow as it was shown to be when he seized the opportunity to flee the country, abandoning his comrades to their fate. The fact that the chief architect of the regime had been able to escape retribution caused much indignation, though it was not widely known at the time that Mengistu's flight was part of a general plan being put into operation by the Americans. The latter reportedly offered Mengistu a safe exit from Ethiopia, either to Europe or the USA, on condition he accepted the untenability of his position. The leading group within the ruling circles (the former Derg members) also seemed adamant that one man should go rather than that they should all suffer the unpalatable consequences of a hopeless war being fought in the environs of the capital.

Mengistu's flight precipitated the collapse of the military dictatorship within a matter of days, giving the lie to reported US assurances that all would be well if Mengistu left. The projected arrangement whereby the rump of the Mengistu regime would be combined with the rebel forces to form a transitional government failed to materialize.

It appears that the USA was in any case intent on undermining the Derg and its party so as to prove to the world that the Ethiopian 'communist regime' could not escape the fate of Eastern Europe, namely total collapse. It is interesting to note that the US urge to inflict retribution on the Derg extended to the point of equivocation about its former policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Indeed, although it is unclear whether the US government had committed itself to imposing a federal solution on post-Derg Ethiopia, it seemed resigned to a separate Eritrea soon after Essayas Afewerki apparently reneged on his agreement at the London talks to his movement's participation in the TG. The main causes of Mengistu's flight and the collapse of his government should, however, be sought in political and economic developments since 1974.

It is indisputable that the struggle to unseat Mengistu had been a constant preoccupation for those who, like him, saw political office as an end in itself rather than a means of implementing policies that might pull the country out of backwardness and poverty. The number of attempts to overthrow him and to continue to rule as a military dictator-

ship was considerable¹ and ranged from those carried out by his colleagues in the Derg² and in the army to those originating outside, such as attempts by the EPRP and Woz League. While these denied the legitimacy of Mengistu's leadership, men such as General Merid Negussie, leader of the failed coup attempt towards the end of the period, saw Mengistu as an obstacle in the face of the troubles that plagued the country.

Moreover, despite the defeat of the 1974 popular movement upon the back of which the Derg assumed power in September of that year only to suppress it ruthlessly thereafter, opposition to military rule was always on the ascendant. The rout of political groups arising from student activism during the decade and a half before 1974 did not stamp out popular aspirations for freedom and liberty. Neither did the disarray among the defeated groups and the subsequent process of decomposition they underwent help the military regime consolidate itself, as might have been expected. Instead, silent but persistent slow-down strikes, as well as other forms of passive resistance by workers both in public and private enterprises and in government departments, emerged. These became effective in eroding not only the authority of the rulers but in frustrating their day-to-day governance. With such an opposition building up in all spheres where the government was directly concerned, military rule steadily headed towards paralysis. Even the universally dreaded secret police who had been trained by the Stasi was ineffective in the face of such total and widespread opposition to the regime. The terror that the *kebele* had previously inspired among the population began to vanish before the unidentifiable mass of opposition.

Eventually, by 1989, this led to the spontaneous birth of an urban popular movement. The quiet, smouldering opposition to the horrors of years of genocide, political repression, plunder and corruption finally burst into flame. The call for a civilian government that could guarantee democratic rights became the beacon of this independent new movement. Despite the ambiguous wording of some of the demands to the military government, the condemnation of the Derg's past deeds

1. On Mengistu's own admission, after the failure of one serious attempt (by the EPRP with the assistance of the EPLF), there were nine attempts by the end of 1976. See note 4 below.
2. These were, among others, Major Teferra Tekle-ab of the Army Engineers (a founder of the Derg) and Major Demissie Shifferaw of the Imperial Body Guard together with their followers.

was its major characteristic. In a matter of a few months this latest wave of opposition to the regime assumed aggressive forms:³ veiled critiques of the government giving way to outright rejection, and a proposal to replace it by a 'committee of elders' forming a provisional body to rule the country until democratic forces could take over through multi-party elections. Castigation of liberation movements in pursuance of the regime's censorship and propaganda was replaced by an appeal to all sides to resolve existing problems peacefully through negotiation.

The creation and development of armed liberation movements whose forces could freely move about in the countryside had exacerbated Colonel Mengistu's difficulties. The silent erosion of the power of the military dictatorship through mass popular disaffection and passive disobedience was accelerated by the growing strength and number of guerrilla armies who harassed and bled the vast but mainly conscripted state army. The general refusal to be ruled by the military clique erupted in some rural areas into open rebellion, independently of whether the diverse rural-based struggles assumed national, regional or secessionist form. What mattered was the addition of military backing to existing passive but debilitating resistance. This symbiosis clearly existed despite its lack of recognition by those engaged in overthrowing the Derg.

The characterization of guerrilla struggles variously as 'inimical to unity', a 'distortion of history' or as the 'only just' course did not affect the outcome of the combination of armed and non-armed opposition, for, from whatever angle such a combination was viewed, the Derg was being driven to the precipice. The fact that the military had assumed power by default and that it was never able to legitimize its rule through the introduction of any measure of public accountability meant that any replacement for it was welcome from early on. Thus the upper hand that the armed movements began to take was perceived more as a blessing than as an alarming development, despite the lack of agreement concerning long-term political consequences.

An important feature of this period was that the defeat of the Derg never required of its opponents any clearly defined policies or the winning of popular sympathies. The Derg had no political capital left after it had suppressed its urban, militant opponents during the three years

3. On 22 May 1990 university students boycotted classes for one day, specifically to protest against the execution of 12 generals, but generally to oppose the government's policies, which they had criticized on previous occasions, though less directly.

following its assumption of power. The fact that the Derg was not born amidst the popular movement in 1974 but on its sideline and in its shadow had always served to remind people that it was a usurper without any credentials; its intervention was always perceived as illegitimate. It had no sizeable support either among the people or the privileged elites and, in brief, it had lost the political battle long before it lost Makalle or Nakfa. Thus its fall was a matter of popular acclaim. Even the wealthy, both old and new, especially those who had benefited from the tremendous corruption surrounding the Derg and its war machine, felt relieved that the 'unpredictable days' were over.

The assortment of economic reforms introduced to placate popular demands involved the people only to the extent of implementing directives issued by the Derg's representatives, whether bureaucrats, cadres or military officers. The *étatiste* policies according to which the state bureaucracy decided everything and the role of the people was reduced to that of a bystander, bred discontent and, as already mentioned, resistance to implementing orders and 'guidelines'. This wreaked havoc on economic performance by individual farmers and cooperative groups, who saw any increase in their production as a liability subjecting them to excessive taxation and levies.

Finally, the Gorbachev phenomenon in the Soviet Union, which had previously been the Derg's mainstay, led to a drying up of military and economic assistance to Ethiopia that the Derg was unable to replace. Since the limited domestic resources had already been committed to war, the Derg was in no position to augment its arsenal of weapons on the international arms market. The belated switchover of the Derg's economic policies to a 'mixed' type in 1989/90 and a readiness to resolve problems of guerrilla movements through negotiation was not pursued in earnest.

The combined effect of these factors was a progressive deterioration in the control of Mengistu and his colleagues over the country in general and the army in particular. The latter was entangled in conflicts which were escalating without leading to any success; on the contrary, the grip of the various fronts on major areas of the country increased.

The poor morale resulting from dwindling logistical support, including shortages of food and clothing, together with successive defeats and the connivance of the military leadership with opposition movements (either through sympathy or bribery) immobilized the vast army and led to its gradual disintegration. Given the growing political and economic crises in the country, the cracks in the ranks of the military rulers were

on the verge of opening up into chasms. Conscripted peasants or urban unemployed, who formed a major part of the army, found it opportune to defect *en masse* to the rebels rather than die for what they saw as a meaningless and unending war.

The chain of command in the army was dealt a severe blow by the execution, after the 1989 coup attempt, of the ablest generals still remaining after Mengistu's periodic clean up of potential or suspected dissidents. The elimination of alleged plotters (high ranking officers) effectively beheaded the army. The accelerated promotion of youthful and little experienced soldiers and junior officers to positions of command by virtue of their loyalty to Mengistu or assistance given in aborting the coup, reduced the command structure to a skeleton of its former self. The operatives of the party and the intelligence services made sure that what remained of the experienced officer corps was kept under check both in terms of their activities within the army and in the making of decisions at the war front. As former officers of the now disbanded army later revealed, no military manoeuvre could be conducted without Mengistu's personal knowledge and consent.

The crisis within the military and bureaucratic state was fast approaching its climax. The battering the army had received at the hands of the EPLF and TPLF-led forces and the refusal of the army to fight for the Derg's aims made the collapse more imminent. Entire divisions abandoned their trenches and disbanded. An initial trickle was later to grow into a torrent of mass desertion from all garrisons, including the 100,000 strong garrison of Asmara. As the Ethiopian army abandoned its trenches and withdrew to the major towns, including Addis Ababa, the victorious forces joined them in the rush to get there first. In the event, both were reported as entering urban areas more or less simultaneously.

Curiously, the dismemberment of the army was not followed by its incorporation into any of the victorious forces. Even the well-trained and experienced sections did not find open arms to receive them and employ their services. It did not seem then, nor was there any indication otherwise later on (after May 1991), that the liberation movements (with the possible exception of the OLF) were intent upon building up their forces on the basis of those dissatisfied with the Derg. The near-total rejection of the 'defeated' Derg army and its forced demobilization was an unexpected outcome which shocked it and surprised society at large. The fact that the families of ex-armed service men could survive, at least during the first six months, on handouts from

their neighbours and relatives was the result of a general sense of compassion towards them and of resentment concerning the neglect to which they were subjected. Indeed, there is a widespread sense of guilt among former soldiers that they allowed this to happen. There is also an evident readiness (if not desperation) on their part to find means of taking revenge on their victors. A few members of the ex-army resorted to terrorism in Addis Ababa and banditry in the rural areas during the first year.

Political Dynamics in the Emerging Period

Ethiopian politics goes beyond the written and spoken. There is an unenunciated, non-verbalized element that dominates it. Such arguments as appear on paper or are expressed at open meetings form part of an exercise in stage management. Window dressing of real aims and motives remains an entrenched preoccupation of the political elite. The most meticulous of researchers would be unable to demonstrate clear attitudes or standpoints on the part of those concerned with the critical issues of the day and of their respective struggles. As a result, unravelling the basic dynamics of the political process requires more than a critique of the published writings issued by the various agents. Their non-verbalized practice also must be taken into account.

For instance, MEISON's collaboration with the Derg was based on the perfectly legitimate question of whether the 'progressive' measures of the Derg were not supportable, and whether one should not distance oneself from allegiance to the old order by accepting such measures and standing alongside it. MEISON had no mass (student) support from the start. Consequently, any direct opposition to the military government would have jeopardized its leadership, which was operating legally and in public. The onslaught of the EPRP on MEISON's 'banda' status only served to push it further into the arms of the military government, which asked for help from MEISON in combating its opponents in return for protection and generous allowances and facilities. When the alliance became completely untenable and servility to the corporals and sergeants (rechristened, thanks to MEISON, as revolutionaries and communists) became the hallmark of the leadership's daily chore, the latter opted to wriggle out into independence – the famous decision 'to go underground' – in 1977. The attempts of MEISON to hold the Derg to ransom at a time when the Somali army was knocking at the gates of central Shoa (they had effectively demanded that the Derg should 'accept' their leadership if it sought to save

itself from the debacle) proved suicidal. The Derg had meanwhile found support from the Soviets and some of the remaining 'progressives' for labelling the MEISON action as treacherous and counter-revolutionary and stamp them out in a matter of days. However, MEISON combined a mistaken evaluation of the various reforms as 'progressive', 'radical' or even 'revolutionary', with a deliberate identification of any opposition to the limited nature of those reforms with support of the feudal-capitalist classes. The reality of a burgeoning military dictatorship was thereby obscured by a cloud of words and an eagerness was manifested to collaborate with a post-Hayla-Sellase regime without regard to its merits, simply because the old order had supposedly been put an end to, and power might be snatched from the hands of the inexperienced military. However closely one were to scrutinize the issues of 'Yesefiw Hizb Dimts', this would not be clear.

A second major consideration in the analysis of post-Derg developments is that access to central power remains the quintessential goal that all issues under debate touch upon, and that popular demands of one type or another aspire to whatever disguises they put on. The desire for such access was the motive force animating all movements that contended with the Derg and finally ousted it. Yet while each movement sought to assert its interests against similar or conflicting interests, none seemed to consider the conditioning effects of other parties' activities. There appears to have been little recognition of the fact that the ultimate consequence of parallel activities seeking to remove the control of the Derg from their respective domains (Eritrea, Tigray, Oromia or Ethiopia) but not agreeing upon a common strategy, would be to weaken the Derg without necessarily leaving such movements in a position to determine the future. There is no evidence that the possibility of internal coups, which might transform the political landscape and pose entirely new dimensions, worried any of them.⁴

4. Only the EPLF seemed to have wanted to *maintain* Mengistu in power. By the simple trick of *wrecking* the 1976 assassination attempt (designed with its assistance) by the EPRP, it got the latter inextricably embroiled with Mengistu personally while by sparing Mengistu's life and prepared him to conduct a vendetta against the EPRP. (Marksmen imported from the EPLF for this purpose but later caught by the Derg intelligence services allegedly confessed to this effect.) The TPLF, too, deliberately chose to prolong Mengistu's role when it became evident that he might be ejected. By turning down the appeal for support by the mutinous armed forces in Asmara during the 1989 coup attempt, the TPLF demonstrated that their political aims would be better served by keeping Mengistu. See the statement of the

Indeed, it was only the obstinacy and ruthlessness of Mengistu in closing all other avenues that might lead to the resolution of the various conflicts that made the Derg's total defeat a precondition for the attainment of change. Any other policy towards the opposition would certainly have posed problems for those who made unconditional claims without having the power necessary to back them.

Even the policy shifts that the economic reforms of the Derg represented were never a matter of discussion for most of its opponents, as it was always perceived in terms of the policies designed during and for the reign of Hayla-Sellase. Thus, for the TPLF and EPLF, the land question was still unsolved and awaiting their 'revolutionary decrees'. In fact the Ethiopian land proclamation of 1975 had effectively abolished previous land relations throughout the country, irrespective of the fact that the 'liberated areas' would not implement them because they came from the 'enemy' in Addis Ababa.

Incidentally, this strange attitude of the EPLF towards the various proclamations of the Derg puzzled the Soviets, who considered the Derg's decrees to be sufficiently 'socialist' and 'revolutionary' to deserve acceptance by the EPLF. However, the Soviets did not appreciate that the EPLF's persistent denial of recognition to any of the Derg's policies (at the same time as it copied most of those which seemed 'revolutionary')⁵ emanated from a desire to maintain a distance from the central (alias 'colonial') authorities in Addis Ababa. How else would their supporters be able to differentiate them from the Derg? Consequently, the EPLF's rejection of the Derg's policies was principally aimed at its own followers. This shows very clearly that agreement or disagreement on politics within an Ethiopian setting was not an issue at all for the EPLF.

For most of the contending forces, therefore, the kernel of the problem was not to be found in the developing situation but in positions adopted at the outset. They detested being ruled from Addis Ababa while believing it was possible and indeed inevitable for an indepen-

TPLF Central Committee of 17 May 1989 to the 2nd Revolutionary Army read out in *Tigrigna* over the 'Voice of the Tigrean Revolution radio station'.

5. The EPLF was at no stage willing to acknowledge this, hence the Soviet bewilderment. Compare, for example, the section on urban housing of its 1977 programme adopted at the first congress. It was a caricature of the Derg's earlier (1976) proclamation. See Davidson et al. (1980: 143-50).

dent state to emerge in this or that part of colonial Ethiopia. The determination to be independent was so great that self-proclaimed liberation movements dreaded the thought of a popular movement championing the demands of all peoples and offering to resolve them democratically. They were openly and unashamedly opposed to the creation of a general movement that would span the length and breadth of the country and would opt to attack deep-seated political problems through common action at an Ethiopian level.⁶

Such a perception was expressed in ideological terms back in the early 1970s by the contraposition of 'the national struggle first' to 'class struggle first' slogans. Although practically all movements claiming to be struggling to liberate their respective nationalities subscribed to the 'national struggle first' thesis, the most consistent proponent was the TPLF. Having been established at the height of the general euphoria about the creation and myth of the people's party (EPRP), when national struggle was castigated as being narrow nationalism, the TPLF upheld this thesis to express the legitimacy of its struggle and as a means of being left alone by its rivals (Berhane Meskel Redda and company on behalf of the EPRP) who had meanwhile set up shop in Assimba in Tigray.

According to the EPRP, this stance of the TPLF was not seen to take them anywhere and seemed all the more true as many of the student activists from the non-Amhara nationalities had joined the EPRP. It is said that the untimely death of Melles Tekle at the hands of the Derg was brought about by his insistence on being part of the general multinational struggle, rather than setting up somewhere in Tigray as part of an independent liberation movement. Nevertheless, neither the EPRP nor the TPLF appreciated the legitimacy of the other's struggle. It was therefore only a matter of time before the two would engage in all-out war to decide which was the real representative of the Tigray and Ethiopian peoples. In the event, the TPLF came out victorious with the assistance of the EPLF.

6. This view that even a democratic platform that might entertain the aspirations of all the peoples of Ethiopia is fraught with danger to sections of the population is reflected in the *Oromo Commentary*, especially volume 1. The allegation is that the Ethiopians are incapable of practising democracy. One author went so far as to call on the OLF to withdraw from the TG because of the claimed inherent difficulty of the Tigreans in power to embrace democracy.

The OLF and other Oromo nationalist groups, such as 'Worraqa', saw things in a similar light to the TPLF. They declared for 'the national question first' and castigated the EPRP as the 'young *neftenya*' on the premise that the struggle to establish a multinational democratic Ethiopia would amount to perpetuating Amhara rule over the Oromo. The question why, if the frequent OLF claim that the Oromo are the majority is true, the Oromo do not rule over Ethiopia *through democracy* instead of opting for a separate state, has not yet been addressed. Yet, as with national groups elsewhere, the aim of the Oromo nationalists seemed to be beyond politics, even beyond discussion. The decision to create an independent state seemed irrevocable and unconditional.

As a consequence, aims modelled on an instinctive urge to create an independent state, irrespective of the intervening circumstances, have remained entrenched on most fronts, except possibly in the TPLF. As fate would have it, the nationalists found in Mengistu an enemy against whom mastery of the logic of the struggles was not a requirement. Victory on the battlefield (misconstrued as people's war) seemed to be the only precondition and justification for every kind of claim – not the other way round. Besides, as mentioned earlier, the conviction that the Derg was wrong or oppressive was too commonplace to require demonstration. The two major tasks, therefore, appeared to be to recruit fighters and to acquire the material basis for conducting a long war. Neither demanded any great work of proselytizing – knowledge of the obvious sprinkled with populist appeals (sometimes including outright lies and deception) were usually sufficient.

Whatever popular support was gained came through this appeal to centuries-old rivalries between national and regional groups in new garb: nationalism or a claim to exceptionalism.⁷ Specific characteristics

7. This is typical of movements that attempt to carve out a new state irrespective of the absence of a national constituency for their politics. Thus, a multinational region called Eritrea or segments of single nationalities (the Tigreans in Tigray or the Somali in Ogaden) consider themselves eligible for exclusive national sovereignty (as, respectively, Eritrea, the Tigray Republic or Ogadene). The failure of nationalist groups to hit upon the traditional formula of gaining access to power, the creation of a nationality-based state, has thus brought forth a claim to exceptional status. In the case of Eritrea, the fact of colonial heritage is considered to be a sufficient common basis to group together disparate nationalities into a new state under the flag of Eritrean nationalism. The question of whether other factors might not outweigh this and give precedence to Ethiopian nationalism is seldom mooted, even if discussion itself is not taboo.

of each region or sub-group were idealized as being idyllic before the Amhara 'invasion' destroyed it. Thus the *gada* system is portrayed as the problem-free political structure which would have given the Oromo a pride of place in human history had it not been for the Abyssinians.

Peasant support was largely gained through a promise to change the world they live in or, if that did not work, by stirring up memories of past misdeeds in order to settle accounts once again. The intellectual groups at the head of these movements did not require any greater support than facilitated the spread of their influence and brought grist to their mill. Questions about the legitimacy of their policies and challenges to their authority were usually avoided through exclusions: exorcizing the determined ones or even eliminating them. Generally, the only intellectual elements who committed themselves to these movements were those who foresaw no future for the central government. For the rest of the intellectuals, it has been a matter of ensuring their personal safety, which might mean choosing exile and contributing from abroad rather than participating directly in risky armed struggles.

The most important political work of liberation movements has been the appeal to foreign powers and neighbouring states to assist in furthering their aims. If the aims did not seem obvious enough, the movements saw to it that the external forces heard what they wanted to hear. Foreign governments susceptible to persuasion got such disparate messages that the movements appeared all things to all states. The upshot of this was that an assortment of governments with varied interests and perceptions helped the same liberation movement. The ease with which most have been able to take in so many governments must have given encouragement to any groups hoping to attempt the liberation of any region or people. A semblance of opposition to oppression and the violation of human rights in the Third World seems to generate widespread support among the public in the West. Channelling such support to every type of cause has also been caught up in Western governments' manoeuvres to bring their influences to bear on supposedly 'independent' movements. Even food aid has been used to bring the movements to heel and indirectly to finance them in furtherance of common goals, namely the departure of the military regime in Ethiopia.

For all these reasons, the politics of national liberation expressed by the many movements in Ethiopia have shown a clear lack of well-considered ideas or of popular programmes. Yet there was a need to discuss and agree upon at least the common areas that might bring them

together, in peace or in war, during the Derg years and after its fall. Should not the struggle, for example, have forced them to realize that working towards the same goal might precipitate a temporary or permanent sharing of state power in order to gain access to the resources that the contentions are all about? Not that this recognition would necessarily have prevented them from encroaching upon each others' interests; or created a common understanding of the interests at stake. Some degree of awareness of the problem might, however, have led to a clarification of policies for the future and shown areas where real co-operation was possible.

This was precisely the major weakness of political opposition throughout Ethiopia's recent history. They could not muster all the forces standing for change and pool the available resources and energies towards gaining ascendancy over their opponent in power. By contrast, political opposition in previous periods was predominantly of a type in which factional strife within the landed gentry held sway. This latter period may be distinguished by the emergence of a bureaucratic-comprador bourgeoisie, which relied on external support to promote its interests against parochialism (whether expressed in regional terms, like the Wayane rebellion, or as purely tribal pursuits). The strengthening of the central state apparatus at the expense of local groups and vested interests was a specific mode in the emergence of a new class-combination that was not necessarily revolutionary nor all that conservative. That the characteristic figure in this drive, Tafari Makonnen (later Hayla-Sellase I) was seen to be firstly progressive, then moderate and finally, conservative epitomizes this period. Whether the Mengistu period introduced anything new other than the eradication of landed interest, is doubtful – all the more reason not to treat the period since the fall of the Derg as different from other post-1974 developments.

During the period under review, the major concern of the military and political forces that had opposed the regime and finally succeeded in overthrowing it, was for legitimacy and a measure of popularity within their respective domains. They always sought to distinguish themselves in terms of their ultimate objectives, although they were willy-nilly collaborators in the struggle to overthrow the Derg, and adopted forms of struggle that were parallel in most respects. The effectiveness of their struggle was a subordinate issue, or one which was considered to follow automatically from the first.

Noteworthy, however, is the fact that the period of the decline of the Derg was marked by the emergence of wider political groupings which

sought to further their respective goals. Thus whilst the TPLF designated its earlier association with the EPDM as a 'Front', it pursued an undisclosed but close strategic alliance with the EPLF. The Derg for its part reportedly attempted to create a broad alliance with 'the forces of unity', another name for remnants of EPRP, MEISON and EDU.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the formation of various groupings was determined more by temporary needs and expediency than by principles. Thus the TPLF, which was known to have labelled the EPLF 'reactionary', nevertheless retreated and settled for a compromise with the latter which appears rather permanent. From all accounts, the alleged huge military involvement of the EPLF in what it used to portray as 'foreign' territory, namely Ethiopia, was certainly not forced on its 'enemy', but requested.

The politics of the EPLF has already been discussed. Its approach towards an alliance with other opponents of the Ethiopian state was, to all intents and purposes, suspicious and negative. For most of the time, it sought to defeat the Ethiopian army single-handedly in Eritrea without questioning whether this was in fact possible. This is borne out by its relations with the ELF within Eritrea, as well as with the EPRP in Ethiopia as a whole.

The EPLF had barely started to link up with the EPRP (when Ethiopian activists fleeing from the persecution of the pre-1974 years sought refuge with the EPLF)⁸ before it broke off relations and denounced the EPRP, after having succeeded in setting up the EPRP in a personal vendetta with Mengistu.⁹ The EPLF did this precisely at a time when the EPRP needed assistance (refuge for its urban guerrillas and its members fleeing from the 'red terror' unleashed by the Derg and MEISON; provisions for its expanding army in Tigray and Gondar). To make matters worse, the EPLF switched alliances to the TPLF with the apparent objective of dealing fatal blows at the remains of the EPRP

8. There was a general build up of a trained would-be guerrilla group until it came under the leadership of Berhane Meskel Redda (who also headed the formative process of the EPRP and the launch of the armed struggle at Assimba).
9. The EPRP went so far as to collaborate with an internal faction in the Derg in December 1976 that had placed Mengistu under house arrest without, however, finishing him off because it underestimated his allies, the MEISON and his military henchmen. The latter struck viciously with a counter-coup in February 1977 and killed the plotters, all highly educated officers, practically the only ones who could have put an end to the Mengistu phenomenon at that time.

and the ELF. The EPRP had by that time ceased to be any use to the EPLF and was suspected by the latter of harbouring chauvinist ambitions of retaining Eritrea if it took power (true).

The EPLF fulfilled its objectives of doing away with the EPRP and ELF, though at the expense of its desire to weaken the Derg; thus the EPLF decided to make a strategic retreat – yielding territories previously won through a rather adventurous conventional war; evidence the toll on its army at the failed attempt to capture Massawa rather than enter into an arrangement with the ELF and become partners in power after the expected expulsion of the Derg from Eritrea. The EPLF seemed to prefer the loss of its previous achievements and sought to cripple the ELF first, before embarking on a major war with the Derg.

It was only after repeated failure that the EPLF was forced to effect a fundamental shift in its military strategy so as to forge alliances with or create a proxy out of willing and like-minded movements in Ethiopia. This would have been unthinkable before the strategic retreat of the late 1970s, as the unwritten constitution of the EPLF precluded it from making any form of alliance with movements south of the border defined by the river Mereb. Previous calls to take on the Hayla-Sellase government through an Ethiopia-wide liberation movement had ended with the massacre of its proponents. The change, therefore, did not arise out of a conviction of the need to accommodate higher principles. The realization that the Derg could not be defeated in Eritrea alone without its opponents striking at its seat of power in Addis Ababa as well as in the southern hinterland crystallized much later.¹⁰ It dawned on the leadership that Eritrean independence could not be achieved without denying the Derg access to the human and material resources of the south on which it could always rely to mount a comeback.

10. See the interview of Essayas Afewerki of 31 August 1990 (broadcast on Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea in Amharic) in which he effectively issued a new military strategy of fighting within Ethiopia too. ('If the Derg government or its successor wants to continue the war after we have taken full control of our country, the battle will not be on the border: we will go beyond our frontier and fight.') The reported capture of the Debre Zeit Air Force base by units of the EPLF which came south via the Assab–Awash highway in May 1991 *as part of the war in Eritrea* (!) was a direct result of such a policy.

The EPLF's volte-face in this matter and its manipulative alliances with forces in Ethiopia (the TPLF and the OLF) proved so workable in Enda Sellasie and Assosa (undertaken with the two fronts respectively) that the extension of such an alliance towards ousting the Derg followed as a matter of course.

While the alliance was based on pragmatic considerations for all concerned, the hold of the EPLF on its claimed territory had the guarantee that the remaining groups would never be able to make inroads without a major war. The TPLF and OLF were in the unenviable position of either sharing power or fighting it out among themselves once the EPLF unilaterally withdrew its consent to be part of a transitional regime in Ethiopia after May 1991.

The successes of the TPLF-led insurgency were therefore partly an extension of the EPLF's effort to manage the situation to the south of the border in a way that was beneficial most of all to its military designs on Eritrea, and to the final aim of attaining the political secession of Eritrea. Pitting the Ethiopian forces against each other would appear to be in its interest, at least for the time being. It may be a matter of conjecture whether the EPLF will benefit from this or if a boomerang awaits it at some stage in the future. But from all appearances, the independence of Eritrea declared on 24 May 1993 seems to represent a definite gain for it.

It should be noted that the fledgling urban movement, used as it was to employing passive opposition against the military regime, but emboldened in its final days, did not emerge as a potent force able to impose its will upon developments. Those who stood up for a peaceful outcome of the various conflicts and managed to set up a committee of reconciliation did not pursue their chosen task to the end. Indeed, the advance of the liberation forces saw a dissipation of these, as the Amharic phrase has it, 'patriots on the eve'. The spontaneous demonstrations staged against the victorious forces, only to receive brutal treatment at their hands, were practically the last of that movement.

The front created abroad by the remnants of the EPRP, MEISON and EDU was precipitated by the successes of the EPLF/TPLF offensive, and not by any common aims of liberating the peoples from the Derg. The MEISON in particular could not claim any new conversion to the people's cause, having helped the Derg bury it in the first place. Yet, these forces were intent on setting up an alternative movement that the West, particularly the Americans, could resort to in case the latter decided to withdraw their support from the EPLF/TPLF. The basic

argument of the CODEF is a plea to the West to recognize that they are backing the wrong horse, namely a group of marxists whose conversion to democracy and market economics is make-believe. They attempted to show that their own abandonment, earlier than any body else's, of socialism or other dogma was sincere and free of duplicity. It is noteworthy, however, that none of them has admitted to mistaken actions in the past, let alone collaboration with the Derg. Neither have they demonstrated that their espousal of policies dear to the Anglo-Americans is any more consistent with their past thinking, than that of the TPLF.

Far more alarming than the manoeuvring of each grouping within the political process have been their attempts to gain power by creating closer relations with foreign powers. The military government itself did not contend with its enemies on the battlefield and in the arena of propaganda alone. It was also engaged on the diplomatic front in ousting them from the confidence of foreign powers. The Italians followed the East Germans and the Soviets in intervening to find solutions by bringing together the Derg and the fronts; the Israelis had taken a position on the side of the Derg in the military and diplomatic spheres. The Soviet withdrawal of its support from its former client allowed the Americans, who had all along exercised some direct or indirect control over events, access to all parties in the conflict. Such a domination of Ethiopia's international affairs by the Americans coincided with the USA's newly assumed role of world policeman after its overwhelming victory against the Iraqi military.

Given the fragmented state of the political movements on the eve of the downfall of the Derg, the picture of the EPLF/EPRDF overrunning northern and central Ethiopia to take control of central state power in Shoa was perceived by some as the north trying, once again, to impose solutions on the south. In respect of the declared EPRDF intention of inaugurating democracy and 'the right of nations to self-determination' (and holding a referendum for Eritrea) there was bound to be resentment against the manner in which the country was being re-divided and ruled in accordance with northern plans. The Addis Ababa Conference of July 1991 demonstrated clearly that the south was there to listen to what the new men in power had to say. There was little semblance of debate, let alone of serious questioning, concerning the proposals (all of them originating from the EPRDF) put to the conference. The extraordinary nature of the proceedings was demonstrated when the main challenger of the emerging status quo, the OLF, nomin-

ated the leader of the EPRDF for the post of president during the transition period.

The various forces that struggled against the Derg have ended up, on its overthrow, constituting a number of contending groups clustered around larger, real or imagined, interests. Thus, while the Tigrean-led EPRDF boasts of lining up a motley of fronts and movements for a supposedly united but democratic Ethiopia, the EPLF in Eritrea is doing the same without any co-operation or consent on the part of other movements. In opposition to them are breakaway or other movements that challenge their legitimacy and do not rule out the necessity of returning to 'armed struggle', though they are currently attempting to use Western support to bolster their case.

There is therefore a continuity of conflict at a fundamental level, which has not been interrupted by the fall of the Derg. That these conflicts appear to be on the increase reveals that the fate of the country is still undetermined.

'*Fiya! Wodih Kizmzim Wodiya*'¹¹ – 'Down with the Derg; Long Live the Derg'

The coming to power of the EPLF/EPRDF coalition from among the multitude of political movements that spanned the country and spilled into foreign countries was received more with a sigh of relief that the Derg had gone than with jubilation at their triumph. The fact of the matter was that *all had struggled* (or at least most felt that they had struggled) against the Derg, although the EPLF/EPRDF managed to secure the victory all had been working towards. In this sense, therefore, the winning of political power by these forces was destined to be perceived as an achievement primarily for themselves.

All those who stood apart from the victorious march on Addis Ababa, and who seemed to be excluded from the booty that the total defeat of the Derg would provide, saw themselves as combatants who had yet to achieve their own goals. The fact that the EPRDF promised to include all forces that had any presence in the political sphere only made it apparent that there were straightforward beneficiaries as of right, and those who might share in the spoils by virtue of an invitation (as a matter of favour) on their behalf. The far from clear circumstances in which some were admitted while others were barred from the July

11. An Amharic aphorism which means that an attempt to resolve a problem remains ineffective so long as it is directed at anything but the target.

1991 conference pointed to the use by the EPRDF of other considerations in addition to those of 'political presence'. This was to trigger off waves of protests and expressions of a lack of confidence in the use that the EPRDF might be expected to make of the power in its hands.

The indignation hidden behind the silent endorsement of the conference proceedings (the outsiders seemed to say, 'deceive yourselves if you may, but we know it all') would only be revealed later.¹² In a country that had been steeped in the experience of the Derg in power play and subterfuge, it was not incidental that the manipulations of the EPRDF would not pass unnoticed. Indeed, anxiety was widespread from the outset on two fronts. On the one hand were those who felt that the imminent reversal of policies on Eritrea and the nationalities would dismember the country (and lead to the loss of power by the traditional political elite centred on the Amhara).¹³ On the other hand, those who had aspired for national autonomy or independence were apprehensive that a US-backed government would not desist from annexation or expansion, a pattern familiar to them from past Ethiopian government practices. While the first group gradually emerged as guardians of Ethiopian unity and territorial integrity (everything the TG attacked or removed found a ready defendant among them), the latter were quick to exploit the new declarations in favour of their cherished programmes – an exclusive franchise to organize and rule over their subjects.

For a time, it seemed that the nationalists would have their say, if not their way, in the establishment and running of new states. To their chagrin, however, their room for manoeuvre was fast disappearing. No sooner had the EPRDF army, dubbed as the TG's army, taken over all positions previously occupied by that of the Derg, than they began setting up political organizations that resembled and duplicated those already existing. The re-establishment of the status quo ante in the south through the deployment of a new army, which was as foreign to the territories as it was to the people and their cultures, had already sent enough of a shock wave through the nationalist groups for the latter not to feel threatened by the rise of their replicas.

The complicated aspect this gave to the politics of nationalism newly simmering within a multitude of peoples is difficult to recount. No

12. One of the participants was later to call the whole thing a hoax from his comfortable refuge in the USA (the Voice of America Radio).

13. The Tigrean elites which had enjoyed the share of power seemed non-committal in the first few months; the perception was growing that the time may have come for them to assume ascendancy once more.

matter what the TG did and said, entire regions and areas were self-governing and busy cleansing those whom they considered to be aliens, whether *neftenyas* or people from other nationalities far or near. Sometimes entire communities, long settled and indistinguishable from the local nationality apart from their different origins many generations ago, were wiped out. Nationalist groups instigated revanchist activities in the hope of claiming the blood price that Menilek and his associates had levied on their ancestors.

Nevertheless, the corrosive power of local national groups on the hold of the EPRDF forced it to react. The impending threat of internationality conflicts and their effect on the movement of goods and people was reason enough to take the various groups to task. The clamp down on local groups showed the futility of attempting to take on the EPRDF single-handedly. Thus was born the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Union (SEPU), a coalition of more than half of the nationalities in Ethiopia.

SEPU's expressed commitment to Ethiopian unity as a precondition for the development and well-being of its respective peoples was a profound breakthrough in the wake of the tendency toward a multitude of small states emerging throughout the country. The value, to national political movements, of SEPU's decision to give higher priority to consolidating the existing state rather than creating mini-states cannot be overstated. It was the first explicit statement against the craze for national exclusiveness and narrow-minded politics. As a matter of fact, it may herald the emergence of a fourth power-centre in Ethiopian politics (the three others being the EPLF, the TPLF/EPRDF and the OLF). The first president of SEPU, Haile Wolde Michael, had called on the OLF and EPRDF, which were engaged in rising tensions before the OLF withdrew from the TG, to desist from unilaterally pushing for war. He had pointed out that SEPU would not stand by while the two were dragging the people into another war.

The impact of SEPU's establishment was immediate. It was not lost on the EPRDF that SEPU represented a challenge to its sonorous but one-sided appeal to national distinctiveness. It did not waste any time creating a rival organization with the same name. The reactive haste with which such an organization was inaugurated and the pressures and threats to the leadership of SEPU indicate that the EPRDF had come to understand something that had been obvious to many before them: that their claim to rule over the south was very flimsy, under-represented in its army and in the top leadership as the south has been.

Meanwhile, the TPLF/EPRDF has pursued its nationalities policy in its own way. Indeed, what distinguishes this coalition from all others is its obsession with the politics of nationalism, and a determination to alter the structure of the state in such a way that nothing remains of what it perceives as the domination of the Amhara over the rest. Every policy, or lack of policy, is measured in terms of its impact on the perceived level or form of Amhara representation in state bodies, institutions of learning and cultural fora.

Restructuring the regional administration has taken the form of national groups being driven into 'reserves' (the Amharic word is *kelil*). This certainly raises a problem from a conceptual point of view (apart-heid?). Nevertheless, the provisional map reportedly agreed between the OLF and TPLF incorporated territories that had hitherto belonged to provinces set up on economic and administrative criteria alone into new *kelil*. The heavy emphasis on linguistic distinctions has created new reserves, extending old provinces like Tigray towards the rich agricultural lands in the west, but bringing together for the first time the Somali, Oromo and Amhara peoples within Ethiopia into solid regions ruled from one centre. On the other hand, the implicit acceptance of the divisions of the Tigrean, Afar, Saho and Kunama peoples, through the legitimization (and recognition) of the independence of Eritrea, exacerbates the affected peoples' desire for unity and does little to resolve long-standing conflicts.

Further problems created by the new subdivisions arise from the inaccessibility of the *kelil* political centres (capital towns) for the ordinary people they are supposed to serve. Bahr Dar, for instance, is too far away from most of the Amhara reserve, standing as it does at the western periphery (instead of at the centre) and thus has little chance of becoming an effective capital.

This is not to say that the old territorial divisions should have been left intact, but the linguistic criterion for divisions has been so narrowly applied that the effect is likely to hinder any chance of economic reconstruction that a thoroughly devastated country may have. Erecting new political headquarters barely five or six years after the Derg had tried a similar experiment and attempting to force the peasantry into villages (both of which had failed disastrously), seems at best ill advised.

This economic reconstruction of implementing the TPLF/EPRDF's 'nationalities policy'. Insisting on actions that have a bearing on nationality without paying attention to other effects reveals little awareness of the kinds of problems paramount for all people: food, shelter and basic

security in day-to-day living. That most people have long since lost any confidence in their livelihood and eke out an existence at a lower level than they enjoyed 10 to 15 years ago seems news to the TG. The desire to implement policies that must lead to further economic hardship is simply unexplainable.

If the TG is intent on changing anything in Ethiopia, it must decide above all to improve the lives of the people before becoming involved in projects that would extract considerable resources from a country where little is available to feed and clothe its population, and where what little is left is fast disappearing in the world economic scramble.

The TG should have been ready to utilize existing infrastructures while pushing for new political solutions to problems: in any case, priority should have been given to economic tasks. To act in such a way that administrative and military activities are pursued as if they were more significant for the survival of the people than economic development is to condemn the country to perpetual poverty and the conflicts that are bred by it. Inevitably, the lack of resources or their misuse will trigger resentment and opposition from all sides, leading to the same kind of questions that have propelled the present rulers into power and may yet force them out.

Another outcome of this obsession with the national question may be a resurgence of national claims on national resources. This will surely arise if the nation is portrayed as the ultimate authority in all matters, and from OLF remarks there is evidence to suggest that its leadership does harbour this belief in the absolute. If there is to be a commitment to national renaissance in all affairs then there is an urgent need to create a proper balance between the interests of one nationality and another. Otherwise, the inevitable national demands for control of resources will foster dissent and opposition.

A further problem with the TG's nationalities policy is its misuse of human resources. While the world is fast moving towards a situation in which information is seen as the most important commodity, and the only opportunity for those determined to catch up appears to lie in creating a highly educated and skilled workforce, the TG's current policies, which either shun intellectuals or openly castigate them, will only worsen the problem for Ethiopia. If the lessons of the post-war world are to be learnt, a speedy build up of the technological skills of the working people is the most urgent and important task. This can only be done if intellectuals are given breathing space within a democratic political system and security of employment, together with a measure

of satisfaction in the things they do. The international system is so weighted against intellectuals in poor countries remaining there and serving the people who have paid for their education, that any policies leading to the feeling on the part of intellectuals that they are undervalued or at threat should be avoided.

The tragedy is that the TPLF/EPRDF has other ideas about intellectuals, essentially identical in spirit with those of the regime it has replaced. True, the Derg required intellectuals to be 'revolutionary' and to desist from opposing it, whereas the present rulers publicly call for 'chauvinists' and 'narrow nationalists' to be sacked from their jobs and to be gagged. There is no denying that both forms of thinking may be inimical to a political system where equality of nationalities is to be realized; but making the contrary opinion punishable through the loss of jobs and security of employment has the unfortunate effect of eliminating those benefits that accrue to the country from the experienced army of civil servants, educators and skilled industrial workers.

It is an unfortunate fact that the 'revolution' being implemented by the TG has imprisoned or caused to flee abroad enough skilled personnel to run many a small African country. And it is disturbing that this process seems to be continuing without an end in sight. The dismissal of a large number of educators from the Addis Ababa University portrays, no matter the merits of their case, the TG's lack of awareness of the ultimate consequences to the country. The scars inflicted on the country by the Derg-induced flight of trained manpower are once again being opened into wounds. It is not uncommon to meet ex-functionaries of the Ethiopian government in Western capitals who have chosen to emigrate rather than submit to the unpredictable and arbitrary standards of service now being put into force.

The ultimate effect of this state of affairs is that service to one's country is gradually being perceived as fraught with dangers and that many prefer to seize any opportunity to go abroad. Unless the dangerous course of sidelining intellectuals or subjecting them to intimidation or punishment is arrested, Ethiopia's chances of recuperating from the wounds of years of devastation by war, mismanagement and misrule will be severely undermined.

On the economic front, the promised privatization of former state enterprises and the opening of most areas to private capital (proposed in *The Economic Policy of the Transition Period of Ethiopia* of November 1992) have yet to materialize. Despite the breaking up of the corporate structure introduced by the Derg, enterprises are still run by appointees

of the TG organized as a 'board'. It is interesting to note that employees have been allowed, for the first time, to send elected representatives to sit on the board as fully-fledged members. While profitability and the removal of state subsidies are brandished as norms for the new management, the implicit decision to sell off *losing* enterprises remains controversial.

A fact of great importance that may affect the IMF/World Bank-driven privatization is the geographic location of most enterprises: Shoa (including Addis Ababa), Dire Dawa and Harar are in Oromia. Unless the future of the Ethiopian state is well defined, non-Oromos might not seek to invest in an area that could declare them foreigners at any stage. There are of course those who argue that Tigreans will want to buy entire enterprises in these areas and then transfer them to Tigray or Eritrea. Whatever the intentions of future buyers, the confusion surrounding the TG's nationalities policy clearly impedes any prospects of an economic upturn.

If no one can invest according to economic criteria alone or without being held back by political considerations, there will be little improvement in the country's economic situation. Partly as a result of this, property speculation and importing consumer articles and spare parts appear to be the only new vistas open to investors, most of whom prefer to do this in Addis Ababa. Attempts to set up small-scale industries have been more apparent in Tigray than elsewhere. Such distortions in the form and direction of private investment may persist until such time as the political landscape is freshly demarcated to guarantee the free flow of capital and labour across the various 'reserves'.

Meanwhile, overpopulation, environmental degradation, several kinds of rents and levies by the state as well as decreasing sizes of plots of land have turned the livelihood of the peasantry in the north into a permanent nightmare. Having suffered the brunt of the struggle against the Derg, recurrent famine and misrule, the Amhara and Tigrean peoples stand at a stage in their history where only a complete break with past agrarian practices and policies can save them from further devastation and humiliation. So far the TG has only managed to collect the habitual taxes without being able to restore previous (Derg) levels of state assistance in the form of seeds, fertilizer and extension services. It remains to be seen whether the TG will take on board what are universally perceived as critical steps in the salvation of the north: the supply of improved agricultural implements and inputs to the peasantry and the carrying out of massive afforestation.

By all accounts, the south of the country is in a relatively better position than the north; but this does not excuse the TG for not having an overall agricultural policy. As the main preoccupation in the south has been to carve out new boundaries for nationalities, agriculture has been as much affected by internecine conflicts as by the lack of a government policy. The divided loyalties of many of the nationalities (between pro- and anti-EPRDF organizations) and the state of anarchy in the south were also bound to affect the collecting and transporting of the country's main export items – coffee and hides. Kenya, the Sudan and Djibouti have benefited greatly at the expense of Ethiopia from the smuggling of such items across Ethiopia's borders.

The overall picture in Ethiopia today is the prevalence of a spectrum of problems, some of which are intensifying into crises and increasingly overwhelming the authorities. The TG not only appears to be incapable of rising to the occasion itself, but provides no avenues for rectification of its weaknesses because it has not allowed the fledgling democracy to work. The distortion of the democratic process has crippled genuine discussion of problems and possible solutions. Informed decisions are lacking at all levels of government, and grassroots involvement in making and implementing government policies is uncommon.

The exercise of democratic rights has not been free of the EPRDF's foul play and tactics reminiscent of the Derg. The curtailment and, more often than not, denial of such rights destroys popular confidence in what the TG is doing. The traditional view of government as extracting wealth from the public to serve the few in office is being reinforced by the continued alienation of ordinary people and political groups from government and all decision making that affects them. The TG's frustrated relations with the trade unions and with professional and political associations that choose to chart their own paths are testimony of its intolerance of democratic institutions that might question what it attempts to impose on them. These are fundamental weaknesses that prompt the TG to attack and dismantle such institutions and the latter to attempt to resist its encroachments.

The TG's conduct of local and regional elections was severely criticized, and the fact that the groups in power had to resort to underhand methods to get themselves elected reflects their own lack of belief in themselves and in the popularity of their policies. Moreover, it has lent credence to the belief that the TPLF/EPRDF victory was not a victory of ideas or policies that were any different from those followed by the

Derg. The lesson those who remained outside of or withdrew from the TG have learned has been that it is not the ideas or principles as such that matter today, but the use of any means, fair or foul, to gain or retain power.

In like manner, a dramatic shift has been evident in the perception of the many people concerning developments under the TG, from an original rejoicing that the Derg had gone (Down with the Derg) and hopes that the EPRDF might be preferable to a feeling of disappointment that their position has not improved. Religious fanaticism and an increased flocking of the faithful back to the church and the mosque are on the rise everywhere in the country. Mysticism and witchcraft are flourishing now that the zealous rooting out of any form of belief by the Derg has stopped. The sense of uncertainty that ordinary people feel about their fate and the future of the country probably account for this development. The nostalgia that ordinary people express for the fallen Derg can only indicate their frustration with the TG under the EPRDF.

Opposition political movements have seized on popular antipathy to the EPRDF/TG and wish to remove it in any way possible without worrying much at all about programmes or policies. Having found the democratic form of mobilizing people, of gaining their confidence and support to be virtually closed to them, they have engaged in scheming and counter-scheming among themselves and with foreign powers. This was demonstrated at the gathering first in Paris and later in Addis Ababa of former 'enemies' and adversaries (the so-called opposition groups) who sought to stage a counter-attack against the TG. The pitting of a French-supported coalition against the pro-American EPRDF could be the first stage in the creation of an atmosphere of further uncertainty in the destiny of the Ethiopian peoples.

So far, no political group has seen fit to raise the problem for the democratic process of involving foreign powers in promoting their sectional ambitions to gain power. While deriding the EPRDF for its opportunism in becoming a tool of US designs on Ethiopia, others do not renounce openly resorting to the same device in the hope of snatching power from them. Indeed, most are busy compiling evidence that the EPRDF are not democrats or that the country is sliding into a civil war in order to influence the Americans who might decide to 'take away the power' from the EPRDF and give them a chance. Until such movements stop dreaming and start finding a base among the people, in whatever way possible and necessary, they will not be real contenders even for sharing power, let alone taking it completely. Foreign powers

too will only use the evidence they compile to extract further concessions from the EPRDF and not to further the dreams of the compilers.

Nevertheless, foreign powers cannot ignore developments inside Ethiopia, or anywhere else for that matter, particularly when the world economic crisis is shaking up current inter-power relations. Shifts in global economic power alignments make it very hard for Africa, let alone Ethiopia, to achieve any sort of independence from these trends. Precisely because of this, Ethiopian political forces need to engage in a fundamental rethink about their erstwhile strategies of political combat for the establishment of exclusive power. The world today is so tightly welded together that no matter how tempting all-out war to gain conclusive victory against 'the enemy' might seem, the success of any political movement will depend on the creation of a consensus, at least among like-minded groups. If the well-being of the people and the speedy removal of recurrent problems in the economy and society are their real targets, these forces should aim to form larger political blocs, which might be able to mount countrywide offensives to change the status quo. They would also provide a stronghold for any government that might otherwise be vulnerable to foreign power pressures.

Conclusion

The collapse of the Derg has not left behind a parcel of distinct and limited problems to be tackled by its successors. A new period seems to have emerged in which varied forces and forms of conflicts predominate. The alignment of the forces and the balances that are being struck are characterized by pragmatic considerations as regards both internal and foreign powers. This is in accord with previous tradition and seems to find justification in past practice and the resulting achievements of those who were past masters in such matters – the TPLF and the EPLF.

The attempt to imitate and repeat this experience is in full swing. Meanwhile, each day in Ethiopia brings to the fore social, economic and political problems in endless variety. The government of the day, however, is more concerned with constructing a power base than with addressing such problems head on and moving quickly to put in place some measures towards resolving them. To the delight of its opponents, the TG is busy tinkering with the old administration, sacking workers, teachers and office employees in an attempt to reduce government expenditure in accordance with the IMF/World Bank conditions of credit, and in line with its conceptions of nationality representation.

The political result of thinning out officialdom without offering

alternative employment to those made redundant will be to increase the national feeling of dejection that the demobilization of the entire national army has created. The discrepancy between mounting problems and the feeble solutions put forward to solve them casts a shadow over the TG. This is likely to result in growing disenchantment, which some do not hesitate to equate with conditions during the final days of the Derg. Two years after the fall of the Derg the victors appear to be as beleaguered by problems as it was by war and famine.

What makes the prospects for the TG worse than those faced by their predecessors is that decades of misery, oppression and perpetual famine under a succession of regimes have taught the people many lessons. They may not be as easily misled now as in the past by clever or arrogant pronouncements from whatever group they originate. In particular they are no longer susceptible to being persuaded that their plight will be magically alleviated by this or that programme, proposal or urgent demand of any political group, whether in power or opposition. The level of distrust among the people to any proposition that emanates from the state and is, as a matter of course, forced on them, is so high that no government can expect to side-step it.

That *étatiste* policies have been ingrained from time immemorial in the Ethiopian body-politic, at least among the northern peoples, means that such suspicions are warranted and are often correct. Any government that fails to address this problem does so at its own peril; for, in the absence of policies that encourage and give pride of place to grassroots activities, age-old dejection will set in among the people, with all the unfavourable consequences for the economy and the country that such an attitude is likely to bring about. It must be taken as axiomatic that the co-optation of the people into the development activities of the country must remain high on the agenda. Without this, plans and projects will remain ineffectual, for any benefits that trickle down from government-initiated activities are likely to be slight and serve merely to cover up bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption.

Even when the people are ready to listen to what they are being offered by the new government, so many of the policies are reminiscent of both the EPRP and Derg that they wonder whether they really can survive them once again. The failed student politics of the 1960s and 1970s, which was incorporated into the EPRP and was then apparently embodied in the EPRDF, is too fresh in the minds of the people for them to wait patiently for the devastation of the past to be re-enacted. Questions inevitably arise. Are the groups in power really equipped to

allay these fears? Do they possess ears open to the judgement of the people concerning their failures as well as their successes? These are liable to remain pertinent questions in Ethiopia for the foreseeable future.

The fact that such questions are raised is a testimony to the uncertain state of popular leadership in the country today. Those who consider themselves in opposition do not seem concerned to work out alternative approaches which might fill the gaps perceptible in the current government.

It emerges from the discussions above that the only path to an informed solution to the intricate problems of Ethiopia is to create a united, secular, multinational popular movement. Such a movement may save the country's fledgling democracy from being encroached upon by those who see themselves as having offered it as a gift to the Ethiopian people, or by those who are so restricted in their outlook that they consider the well-being of sections as being paramount, thus forming a basis for political intrigue, whether among domestic forces or between such forces and foreign interests.

A second possible line of approach to the current problems is to mount a virtual crusade to change the political culture of the political elite. It is well known that there is a fractional tendency among politicians. The culture of maintaining public appearances until such time as private conviction and designs may be realizable through subterfuge, *coup d'état* and so forth fosters unpredictability. If the TG, or any other government, is to have any hope of success, it should open up all decision-making to scrutiny by the public, as well as to those forces on whose behalf it is ruling the nation.

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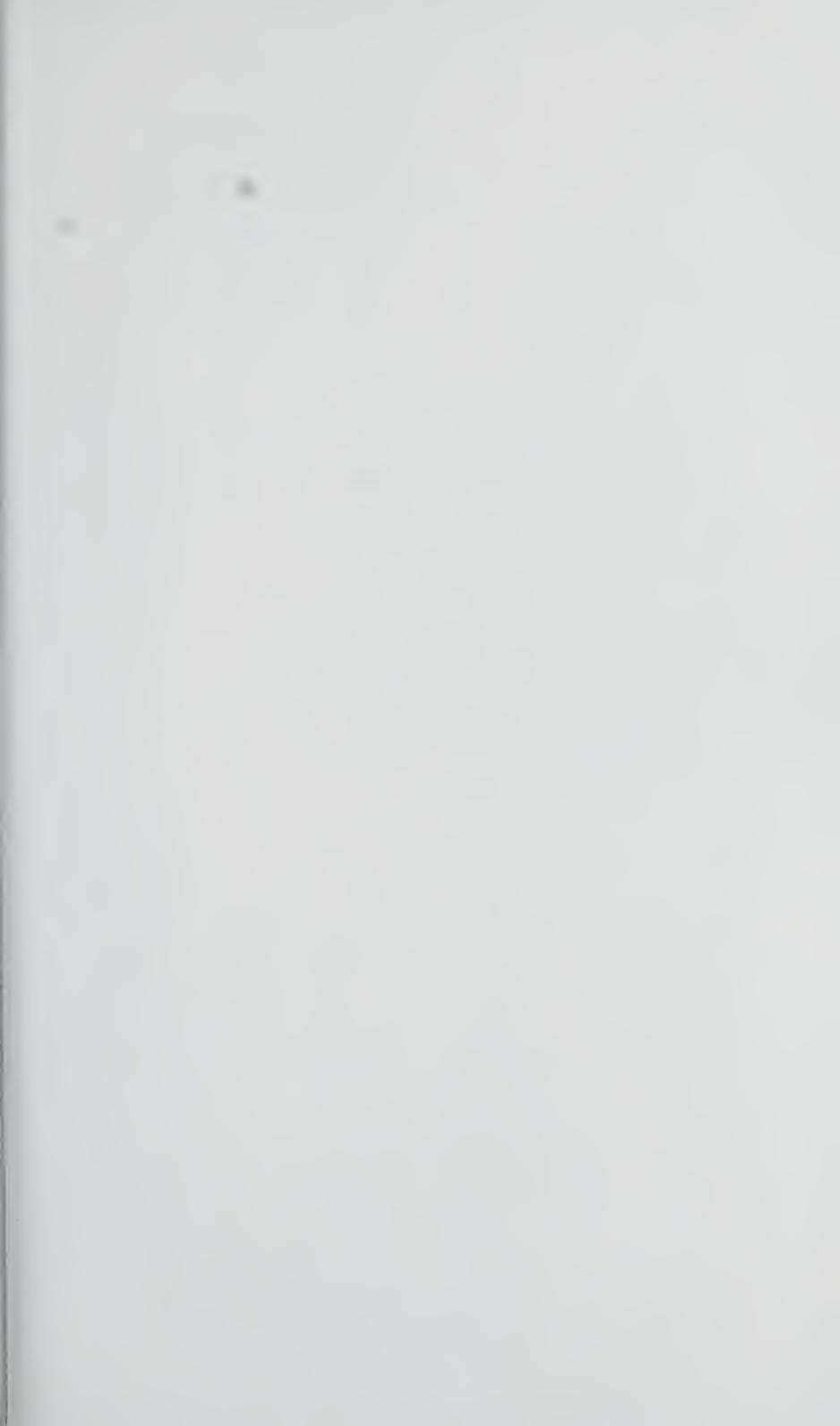
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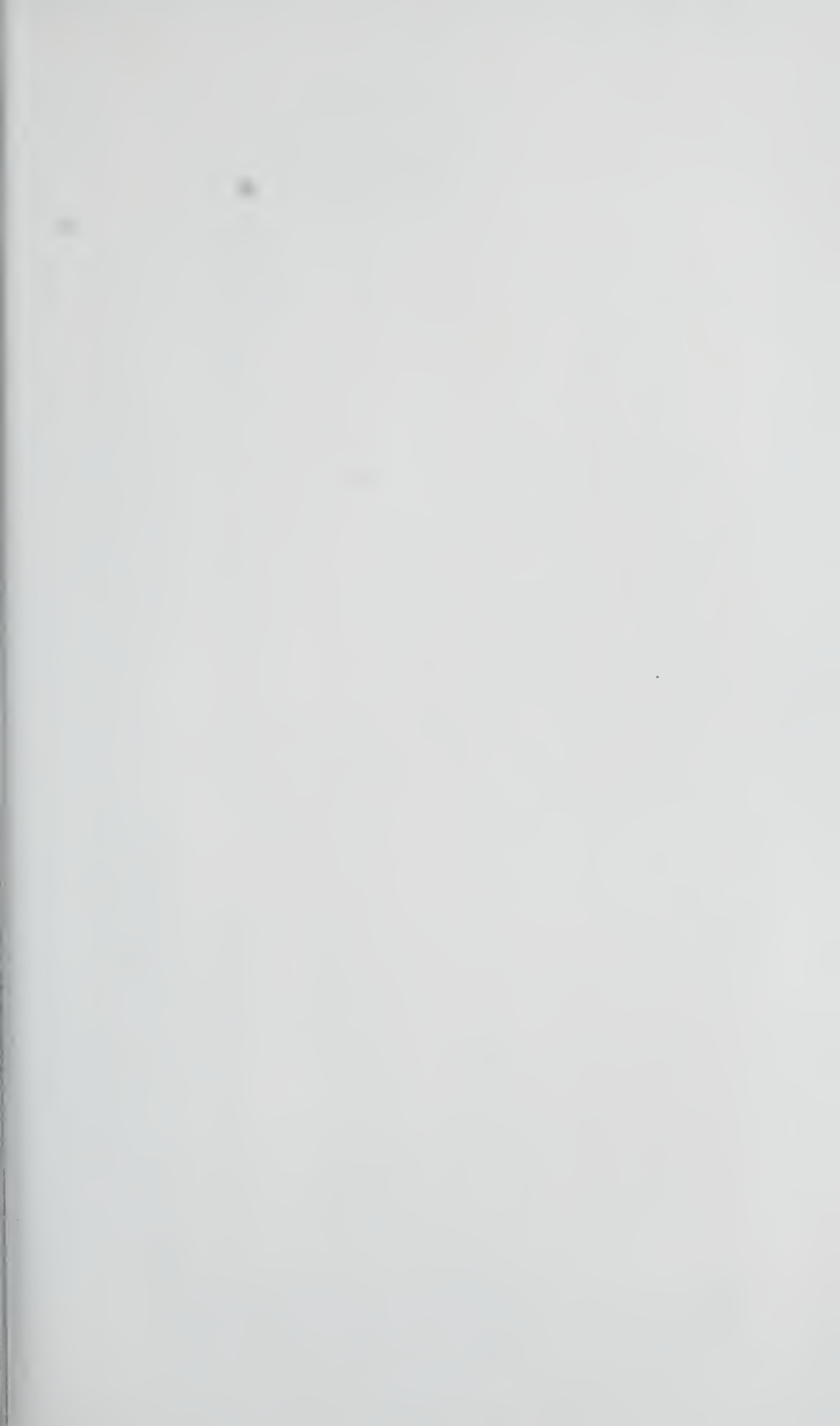
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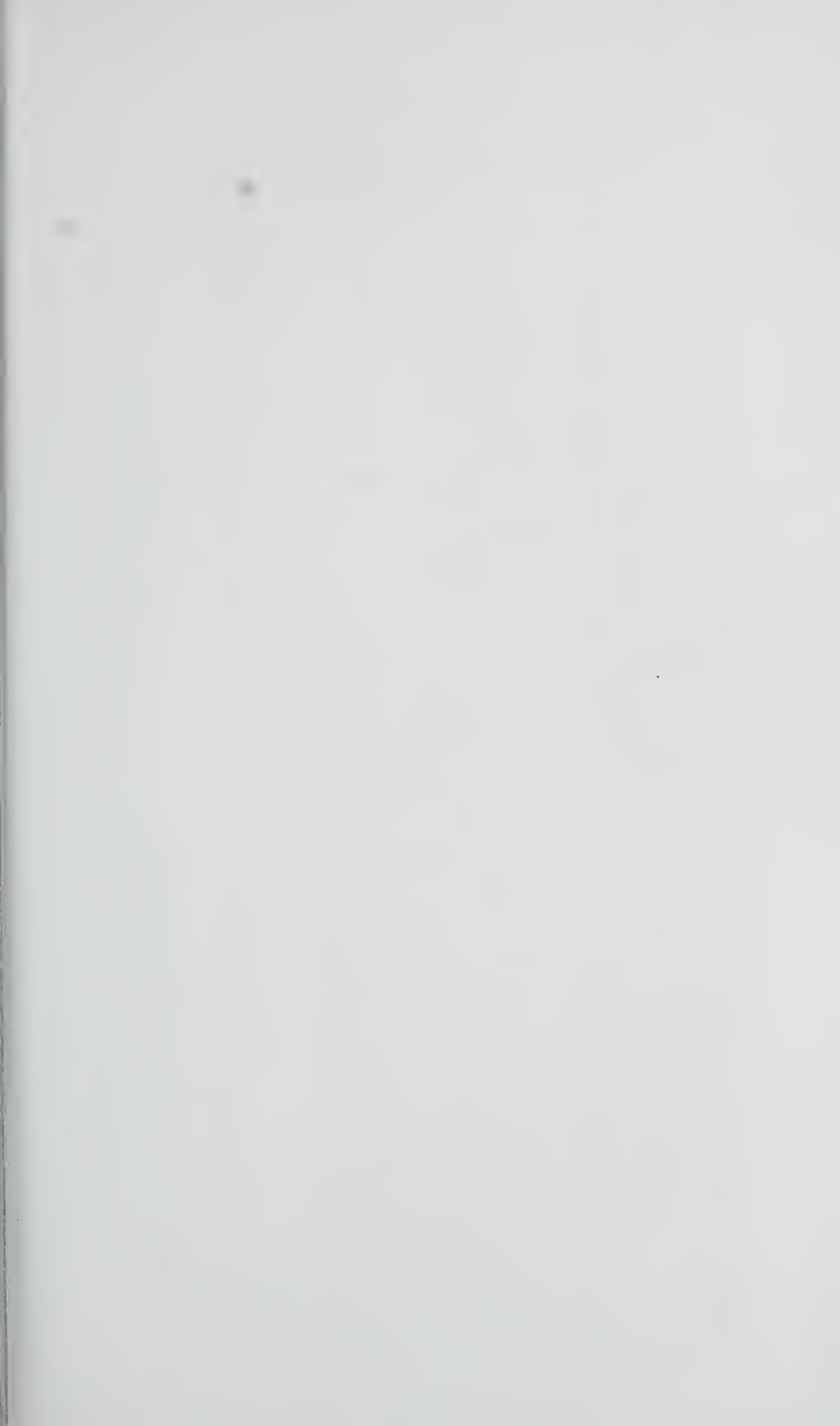
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